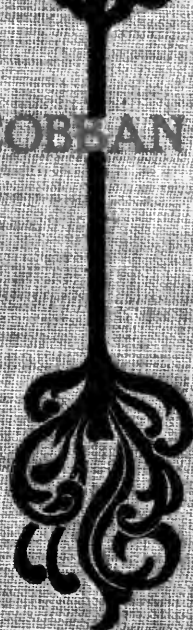
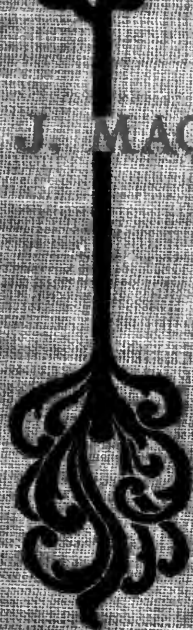


A Soldier and A Gentleman



J. MACLAREN COBBAN



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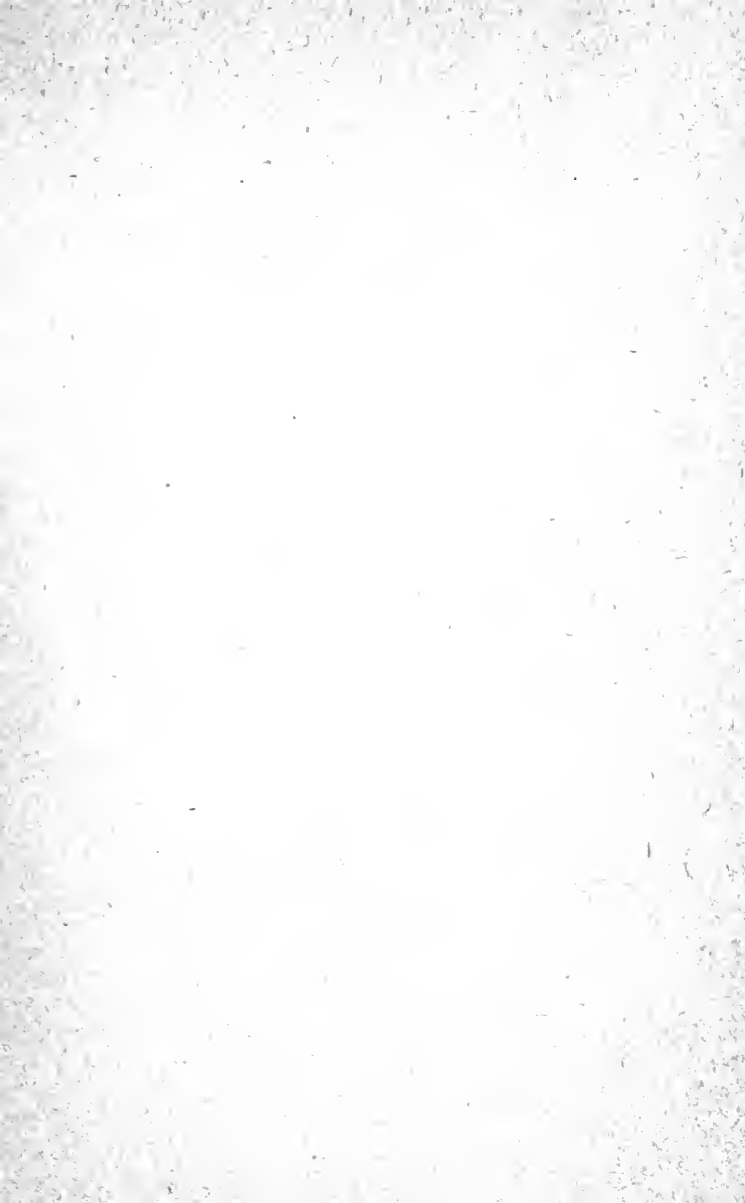
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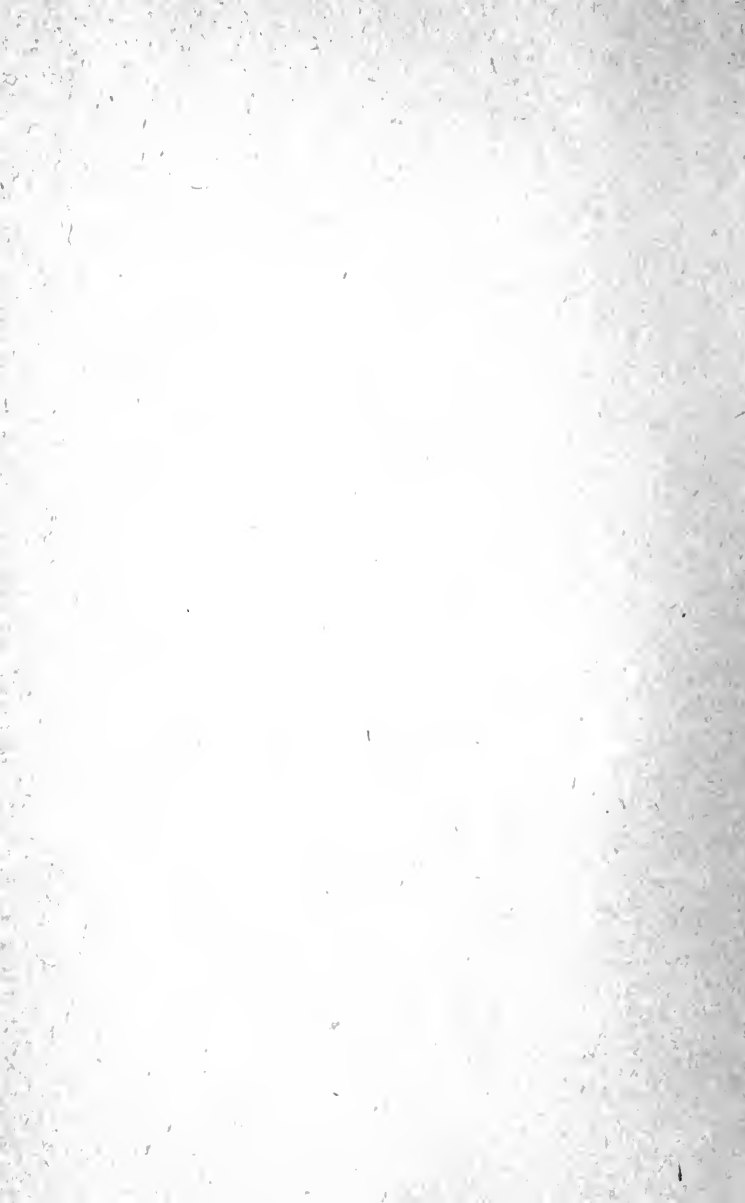
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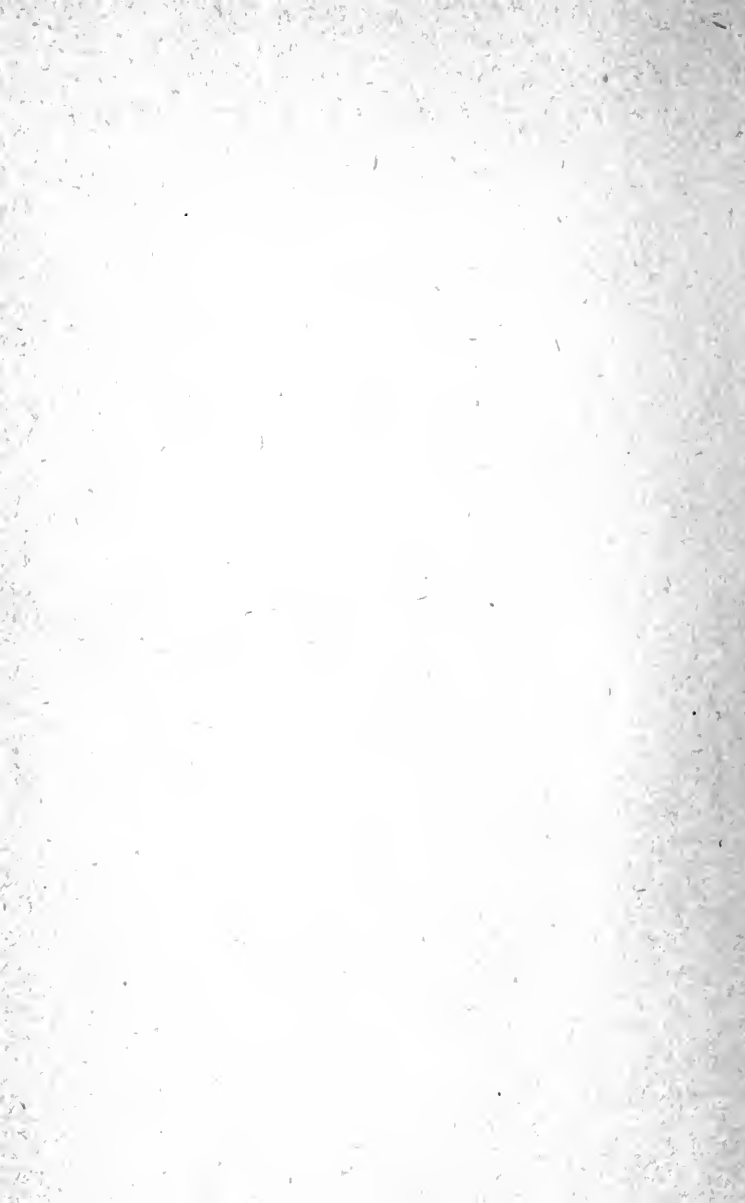
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A SOLDIER AND A GENTLEMAN



A Soldier and a Gentleman

BY

J. MACLAREN COBBAN

AUTHOR OF

"The Horned Cat," "King of Andaman," etc.



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A SOLDIER AND A GENTLEMAN.

CHAPTER I.

AN EVENING OF ADVENTURE.

It was an unusually hot week of the uncertain month of July. The heavens were as brass, and the elements seemed melting with fervent heat. There was not a breath of air to suggest coolness. The leaves of the trees in the parks looked scorched, the grass was parched and brown, and the ornamental waters appeared stagnant and unwholesome. Throughout all London the bricks were baking, and the people sweltering in the direct and reflected sunshine ; but nowhere was the heat more fetid and stifling than about Soho. The atmosphere was charged not only with the exhalations of a poor and densely-packed population, but also with the odours of neglected refuse, vegetable and other, in the courts and the streets.

In the early evening, women with babies and women without, neither very much tied nor very much buttoned, sat on door-steps, or leaned against door-posts with their arms lazily crossed ; while half-clad children played and shouted and perspired in the gutters or ran in and out of the shady courts ; and hulking or evil-looking men, with pipes in their mouths and their hands in their pockets, hung about corners and the swinging doors of public-houses. In Dean Street the only active persons to be seen were two or three costermongers with barrows of fish or fruit, who, with their arms and their throats bare, urged their laggard donkeys as feelingly and yelled as lustily as usual ; and a melting postman in unofficial straw hat who urged his weary rat-tat round.

There was another, a tall, well-built young man, who emerged from one of the houses, a miracle of coolness. He was dressed in a tweed suit and a round hat, and he carried a pair of gloves and a little cane which was much too short to walk with. He was turning down the street with a swinging stride when he observed the postman. He returned to the door from which he had come, and waited till the postman approached. "Anything," he asked, "for George Ferrers ?"

The postman carelessly glanced at the address of two or three of his letters, said "No," and passed on.

George Ferrers jerked out a nod of acknowledgment of his courtesy, tucked his little cane under his arm, set his hat a little more jauntily over his eye, strode away, his step ringing clear on the pavement. He was evidently not in the calmest of tempers. Once or twice he muttered "Damn!" to himself and beat his thigh with his cane. He swung right on his way, elbowing aside without compunction the hulking loafers, who turned with a furious "Wot the b——!" which became a cheerful "All right, guv'nor," when they saw the tall, muscular figure. The children stopped their play to look up at him, and the women glanced at him with approval and seductiveness.

"Fine man, ain't he?"—"Looks like a officer"—"There's a gen'leman for yer!" were some of the least questionable of the comments made on his appearance—comments which his quick ear caught, and which somewhat soothed his temper; for to the average healthy man there is nothing more agreeable than the admiration of womankind. He twirled his fair curling moustache with an air, fastened, in spite of the heat, one button of his coat, the better to

show off the lines of his figure, squared his shoulders and swelled his chest, and marched with something of that bow of the leg which marks the matured Lifeguardsman. Through the squalid swarming streets of Soho and St Giles he thus made his way, and arrived in St Martin's Lane, crossing which he found himself at the corner of Long Acre. There he paused, and debated with himself a moment, slowly twisting the ends of his moustache. He was hungry. Should he content himself with bread-and-cheese and a glass of ale in a tavern? Or, should he deny himself the ale, and have something more staying and nutritious in the *à-la-mode* beef-shop at his elbow? Though he had what he called "a thirst" upon him, he decided for the diet without drink, and turning on his heel, he entered the shop *à-la-mode*.

It is scarcely fair to expose all the bare shifts to which patient merit may be reduced, and how it has often parsimoniously to consider the purchasing power of a penny. Let it suffice to say that George Ferrers made a tolerable meal, to which a piquant relish was imparted by the kind looks of the plump, though somewhat untidy, serving-girl behind the counter. The box in which he sat to consume his viands was inadequate. The seat was narrow, and

his knees touched the bench on the other side of the little table. A little man might have enjoyed in it complete privacy except from the overseeing eye of the counter-girl ; but George Ferrers could conceal no more than his plate and a few buttons of his waist-coat. He sat so high that he could see into all the other boxes, and he felt that his dominant height had a depressing effect on the dirty carters—themselves bulky men—and the nondescript loafers who were feeding in them. He hurried, therefore, through his meal, paid for it—not forgetting to tip the plump serving-girl, who responded with a surprised, “Thank you, sir”—and returned into the street.

He chinked his change in his hand, and dropped it into his pocket with as much of a pang of anxiety as his cheerful spirit would permit him to feel. The few pieces of silver and copper—making one-and-ninepence in all—were the amount of his pecuniary resources, and he had no immediate prospect of more. Yet he must have a smoke. He had had his appetite for food but half allayed ; for it took a good deal to keep his continent of body in condition ; but he knew he would feel satisfied if he had a pipeful of tobacco. Turning down St. Martin’s Lane, therefore, he entered a tobacconist’s and purchased a half-

ounce of his favourite mixture. Then filling and lighting his pipe, he strolled serenely and gallantly down to Trafalgar Square. He leaned over the parapet, knitted his brows, smoked hard, and asked himself what he should do.

He was where he had often been of an evening before. He leaned on the parapet and looked away down over the silent fountains into Whitehall, to that front of the Horse Guards where, in other days, he had often appeared in all the glittering panoply of war, on his black horse, in steel cuirass and gorgeous helmet. England had been to him a pretty hard step-mother. She had taken twelve good years of his life; had marched and counter-marched him; had sent him to the Soudan—whence he had returned but a year ago, a gaunt and sun-burnt member of the famous Camel Corps—and had then turned him adrift and shown no further interest in him. He did not complain: he was too well drilled a soldier and of too cheerful a nature to do that; but as he let his eye rove round, still asking himself in the backward of his thought what he was going to do, he resented the fat and prosperous appearance of the crowd surging and perspiring east and west, and north and south, in loose coats and white waistcoats. He

wondered how they would look if they were collected into a regiment and marched into the desert, where there was only a modicum of the tinned "junk" of Australia or Chicago to eat, and not a drop of water to drink; and if, when choking and cracking with thirst, a horde of fuzzy-headed, gigantic black devils came howling down upon them, thrusting at them with shovel-headed spears, and hacking mightily at them with huge crusader swords. Of what use would they be in a trial of pluck, strength, and endurance? And yet he reckoned there was not one but had gold and silver in his pocket, while he had only one-and-sevenpence, and did not know where to get another shilling. Of course he had a father, a farmer in a dale of Cumberland; but he was not going to beg money of the old man—no, not if he were starving. Trafalgar Square, he had heard, is the centre of London, and London is the centre of the world; therefore, he stood in the very heart, or bull's eye, of the life, wealth, and business of the world. He was well placed, then, and ought to get on. Yet why had he received no answer to any one of his own advertisements, or of his replies to the advertisements of others? He could not guess, unless it were that for a big fellow with curling moustaches and

long legs, who had served twelve years in the Life Guards, there was no place in civilian life.

So he asked himself again what he was going to do. He was resolved he would not go to his lodging that night—the dingy, frowsy garret in Soho—without having settled something one way or another about his future. He had heard it said, “Adventures are to the adventurous;” and since an adventure had not sought him out, he thought he had better seek out an adventure. Which way should he go?—North, south, east, or west? He stopped—regardless of the curious side-looks of the passers-by—set his little cane erect on the pavement and let it go. It fell at once to the west; and to the west—into Clubland—he at once set off. His pipe was empty and his mouth was dry: he let his tongue “click” against his palate, to assure himself how much he was in need of a drink. He thought he might indulge himself to the extent of a half-pint, since he must presently—he laughed—run against a frail old gentleman who needed a prop for his declining years, or a lonely dowager who longed to adopt a son; and he knew himself as strong as a tree and as active and willing as a horse.

The sun had set with the cloudless glow of a

furnace behind the further end of Pall Mall, and the stifling, breathless shades of night seemed to rise from the ground as much as they sank from the sky, as he left Trafalgar Square.

"Here goes!" said he; and he turned up the narrow street on his right to "wet his whistle" before committing himself to the search for adventure in the west. He turned into the bar of the first public-house and asked for a half-pint of "old and bitter"—the Guardsman's favourite drink.

"Old and bitter, sir?" said the smart barmaid, looking not unkindly on his stalwart figure and handsome, good-natured face as she drew the liquor. She seemed not disinclined from conversation; but she was anticipated by a well-dressed, black-muzzled man, with his tall hat tilted back, who sat on a stool, smoked a cigar, and drank spirits-and-water. "Have a cigar, mister?" asked the man, displaying an open cigar-case.

"Thanks—no," said Ferrers. "I prefer a pipe;" and he produced and filled it. He had that instinct of English reserve which repels the familiar advance of a stranger.

"Excuse me," said the man; "but you've been a soldier—haven't you? I've been a soldier myself."

"In the Horse Marines, wasn't it?" said Ferrers with a laugh.

"No, sir; in the American army."

"I thought," said Ferrers, "you didn't look like a soldier. May I ask you a question?"

"You may, sir."

"Aren't you an Irishman?"

"I am; and proud of the fact, sir, of belonging to that down-trodden nation. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, just because I thought only a downtrodden Irishman would go and serve under a foreign flag and then brag about it to an English soldier."

"I served in America, sir, not as a private, but as an officer. In your blessed English army, would I have had a chance of being an officer?"

"I hope not," said Ferrers with a laugh.

"No," continued the Irishman, pulling his hat on and getting warmer. "I'd have had a lot of insolent bloated aristocrats over me."

"Perhaps," said Ferrers, "you know more aristocrats than I do. But I've known some, and I'd prefer them to the only officer I ever met of the American army. My captain was a Viscount, and my major was a Duke, and they were the best fellows I ever knew. Of course they lost their temper sometimes,

and sometimes swore a bit ; but every man that is a man does that. But I've fought shoulder to shoulder with them in square in the Soudan ; we've drunk the same dirty water from the same confounded water-bottle ; and we've sung the same songs riding through the desert. And if I were on my last legs, I'd ask them to help me before I'd ask anybody else ; and they'd do it too.—What do you think of that ? ”

“ What do I think of that, sir ? ” said the Irishman, rising from his stool, swallowing the last drops of his liquor, and moving to the door. “ I think that very likely you blacked their boots.” Saying that, he was gone, and Ferrers' toe was too late to help him out.

“ You had him there,” laughed the barmaid ; “ and he's bolted.”

“ He has,” said Ferrers. “ But I may meet him another day.”

He finished his drink and departed, thinking over what he had said. His defence of his officers was quite unpremeditated. They had not been in his thoughts, and it had not occurred to him to appeal to them to find a way for him out of his present deadlock. But now that the suggestion had arisen quite of itself, as one might say, he asked himself, “ Why not ? ”

So he marched on westward, till he found clubs to right of him, clubs to left of him, each one volleying forth from open windows above and below the liquorish and appetising odours of good cookery. Lord Debrett, he knew, was to be heard of at the Junior Carlton; and he walked slowly past its ample and imposing doorway. But a glance at the hall porter, who was taking the air on the top step, and who looked as important as a Secretary of State, and far more alarming than his late captain, and a glimpse of the gorgeous marble interior, so daunted him that he lost heart.

He passed on and up St James's Street, and so into Piccadilly, and on again westward. He was offered sundry adventures of a doubtful kind, but he marched steadily on. The roadway was thronged with omnibuses, and red-eyed hansoms and carriages bearing people from home and dinner to theatre, opera, or party; and the pavements were peopled with well-dressed persons of both sexes; but nowhere did he perceive a hint of the frail old gentleman or the lonely dowager who, he had hoped, were longing to adopt him.

When he was near his old barracks of Knightsbridge, he thought he was about as far west as civili-

sation and opportunity could extend, and as Fate could expect him to go. However, he consulted chance again, as he had done before. He set his cane upright on the pavement and let it fall. It fell without an instant's hesitation to the east.

"Very well," said he to himself. "Back I go." So he returned the way he had come, his hope of adventure sinking lower and lower the nearer he approached to Trafalgar Square. At last he was back in his former place, leaning over the parapet. It was now quite dark, as dark, that is, as it ever is on a hot, clear-skied summer night. The space below him around the fountains was inhabited by dark figures, moving, as it seemed, aimlessly about; while the benches were almost completely filled—"with the unemployed," he thought.

"I'm one of the unemployed," he said to himself. "I'll have a seat." He descended the steps, made room for himself on a bench, and lighted his pipe. He sat thus for a little while musing. He saw in imagination his old home in the Cumberland hills under the summer night—the rich fields sloping down from the dear, ivy-clad house, and the sheltering wood behind. In fancy he heard the bark of the watchdog—bark answering unto bark all down and round the

dale—and the low of the kine returned to pasture from the evening milking ; he smelt, too, the sweet cool odour of the new-mown hay, the rich evanescent scent of the roses in the farm-garden, and of the honeysuckle in the hedges round ; and a lump rose in his throat, and he wondered whether, after all, he had not better return, like the prodigal, to his father and take what place could be found for him. Suddenly he became aware of loud and angry voices not far off ; and looking up, he saw near one of the fountain-basins a dark knot of people which was drawing to itself more and more dark units from all sides. He rose and went over. As he approached, a shrill female voice rose in the air—"Police !" and continued in a key but little below the shrillest : "I'll see if you'll molest a woman going quietly about her business—you bad man ! you black, nefarious creature—you !"

Elbowing his way into the centre of the crowd, he saw that the "bad man" on whom the woman's rage was concentrated was the black-muzzled Irishman. He was declaring to the amused or indifferent bystanders that the woman had done this and that, and had said this and that to him.

"Why don't you let the woman alone?" demanded

Ferrers. "Is it Irish or American manners to make a row with a woman in a public place?"

"Mind your own business," said the furious Irishman, "you —— English lamp-post!"

Ferrers said not a word; but stepping up to him, he gripped him by the waist, raised him and shook him as a mastiff might shake a yapping cur, and dropped him into the water of the fountain-basin. The crowd, which had held its breath a moment, now roared with laughter: the ducking was a joke it could appreciate.

CHAPTER II.

COMRADES.

"By Jove!" Ferrers heard a voice exclaim behind him, "I've known only one man that could lift another man like that!"

He thought he knew the voice. He turned, and saw a gentleman in evening dress about as tall as himself pushing towards him. It was Lord Debrett, who came and looked him in the face and grasped his hand.

"What? By Jove! it is you really, Ferrers. What are you doing here? Come along. The police are sure to turn up now when it is all over, and they may want to collar you."

The Irish-American had scrambled out of his unexpected bath, and dripping with wet and fury he cried: "I'll remember you for this! I'll spot you!"

"You'd better scuttle home," said Lord Debrett, "and change your clothes, or you'll catch cold. And having thus said, he took Ferrers' arm and led

him outside the crowd, where he was joined by another gentleman in evening dress. "I was right," said Lord Debrett.—"Let me introduce to you, Sir William, my old comrade, Ferrers of the Blues—Sergeant Ferrers that was.'

Sir William bowed somewhat stiffly ; and Ferrers, being taken thus at unawares, returned the bow rather awkwardly. He felt he did not like Sir William, for no other reason, perhaps, than that he had made him to appear awkward. Sir William was middle-aged, thin-whiskered, lean, and of the middle height.

"Come and let us have a talk," said Lord Debrett.

Ferrers said nothing ; the presence of Sir William kept him from being quite easy and frank with his late captain.

"Were you going anywhere in particular ?" asked Lord Debrett.

"No, my lord," said Ferrers ; "I was just hanging about."

"Well, Sir William and I were just walking down to the Gaiety for an hour ; we have to go somewhere else afterwards.—Suppose, Dawlish, you go on to the theatre and come back and find me in the smoking-room of the Club ?"

"That will suit me very well," said Sir William.

"And me, too," thought Ferrers; and he bowed adieu to Sir William Dawlish with the greatest goodwill, supposing he saw the last of him. But he had not done that by any means; and thereby hangs our tale.

The comrades-in-arms walked off together along Pall Mall.

"Who was the man you ducked, Ferrers?" asked Lord Debrett.

"I don't know, my lord," answered Ferrers. "I met him first an hour or more ago in a public-house, where he was calling English officers names; and I came across him again now rowing with a woman, so I settled both counts by sousing him."

Lord Debrett laughed. "But look here, Ferrers. Don't call me 'my lord' or 'captain' when we meet like this, any more than I call you 'sergeant.' We've been comrades; and if it hadn't been for you, my bones would be bleaching with the rest at Abu Klea; so just call me Debrett, as I call you Ferrers."

"Very well," said Ferrers, feeling not unnaturally somewhat lifted up.

"Now, tell me what you've been doing since I

saw you a year ago. I thought you had made up your mind to stay in the country with your father."

"So I had."

"And why didn't you go?" asked Debrett.

"I did go. And I stayed with him all through the winter and spring. But I got tired of the country; I wanted to be back in London; and so I came away about six weeks ago before all my money was spent."

"And how have you been getting on since?"

"Well, times are not too lively."

"But you've got something to do, I suppose?"

"No; nothing."

"Nothing! That's bad. You've tried, I suppose?"

"Tried! I should think so!"

"But you're clever. You can write well and tot up accounts."

"There are lots can do that better than me. I haven't tried for that."

"What have you tried for?"

"I've tried for drawing——"

"I know you can draw and paint first-class."

"Well, I've offered myself as a War Artist, and

shown some of my things. They liked them ; but there ain't a war on, nor expected—worse luck !—So they just took my name in case anything should turn up ; though they seemed to think I was too big, too noticeable, and would take too much to keep."

"Little nippers of men, I suppose," said Debrett, "would do better for that."

"I've offered myself," continued Ferrers, warming to his narrative, "to teach the use of the sabre in a fencing-gallery ; but it appears nobody wants to learn cavalry practice, and rapier practice I don't know."

"Humph !" grunted Debrett meditatively.

"I've offered myself as a riding-master ; but they wondered if they had any horse strong enough to carry me. And I've answered advertisements for lots of other things, but without getting any reply. The fact is I seem to be too big for anything, except a door ornament with buttons for a swell shop or restaurant."

"The doose you are !" exclaimed Lord Debrett, meditatively twisting his moustache. "I daresay now if I broke loose and spent till I could get no more to spend, and if I had to take up some occupation, they'd think me too big, by Jove !"

"Oh," said Ferrers, "you're a lord. For that, the bigger the better."

"Is that it? So being called a lord has its advantages."

"I should think so—rather," said Ferrers with a laugh.

"But go on," said Debrett. "Tell me about yourself. You mean to go on trying to get something, I suppose?"

"I mean to go on trying; though, to tell the truth, I don't know what to try for next."

"Do you think I can do anything for you? If you find yourself short, you know, Ferrers——"

"Oh, I'm all right," said Ferrers quickly.

Debrett was suspicious. "Come now, Ferrers," said he; "on your oath—how much money have you got?"

"Well, Debrett, to tell you the truth, I've only got one-and-fivepence left."

"Good heavens! One-and-fivepence! And," he declared with a touch of contrition in his voice, "I'm smoking, I believe, a one-and-sixpenny Partaga!—But you haven't been on starvation rations, surely! Now I look close at you, you're rather thin and pale."

"Well, for a fortnight or so I've just managed to

throw dust in the eyes of my appetite, so to speak. But it takes an enormous deal to choke off this appetite of mine."

"Come along; come and have something," said Lord Debrett, hurrying him into the Junior Carlton, through the great swinging doors, up the broad steps, and into the depths beyond.

Ferrers cast a glance in passing at the watchful Secretary of State in the porter's box, and wondered that an hour before he should have been so afraid of him. He was led into a private dining-room and set down at a table. He was asked what he would like, and with little hesitation he declared for cold beef, bread and bitter ale. He asked Debrett if he was not, going to eat also. Debrett said he could not, having little more than finished dinner.

"But," said he, "I'll keep you company with a drink."

Then he refused to say another word till his friend had eaten his meal. He sat in an easy-chair, pulled his moustache, and ruminated. Presently, when Ferrers' efforts had slackened a little, he turned to him as if he had come to a weighty conclusion. "Do you know, Ferrers," said he, "I think you've not come enough the old soldier, as you used to say; you've

been too-straightforward and frank with those civilians."

"What do you mean, Debrett?" asked Ferrers.

"Well, you haven't bounced. You've just led them to think you were a poor devil of a simple soldier, strong, deserving and willing. That was a mistake."

"How do you mean?"

"Don't you see? There was a want of generalship about it. You remember how Drury Lowe took Cairo? With a bit of bounce!"

"Yes, by Jingo!" said Ferrers with enthusiasm.

"Pluck first and bounce afterwards."

"Well, there you are," said Debrett. "You've got pluck, but no bounce. Now look here. Though you're not a gentleman, Ferrers—you know what I mean, that you haven't birth, or estates, or that sort of thing—you'd very well pass for a gentleman with most people: you look like a gentleman, and you have the manners of a gentleman."

"I've lived with your lordship so long," said Ferrers.

"Don't say that again, Ferrers. It's only when you open your mouth and say something of that sort that you show, to anybody that knows, that you're not the proper thing. Don't say much to these civilians, and whatever you do don't be humble. Go about

well dressed—you know how—call yourself captain or colonel ; keep a stiff back, and, if you think it will work, be quietly insolent : those civilian beggars, I believe, will like you all the better for it.”

“I believe you’re right,” said Ferrers, with his brows puckered in attention.

“Of course I’m right. I’ve seen it many a time. Now you take my tip and you’ll get on.”

Lord Debrett uttered himself solemnly, as if what he said was the result of the garnered observation of a lifetime ; and very likely it was.

“I believe you’re right,” repeated Ferrers. “Why, I’ve seen jokers myself, since I’ve been about now, come that game. They’ve stepped in and looked round as if all the place belonged to ’em, and they’ve ordered a cup of coffee and a slice as if they could buy up all the stores if they liked, and they’ve got served better and quicker than anybody else.”

“That’s rough sort of practice, though,” said Debrett, sagely shaking his head. “That’s overdoing it. Don’t overdo it, Ferrers.”

“I quite understand,” said Ferrers ; “oh, yes. There’s a way of doing it, of course.”

“Well, you take the right way and you’ll get on.”

The simple comrades then adjourned to the smoking-room, where presently Sir William Dawlish entered and found them. Ferrers was not embarrassed, as he had been before, by Sir William's presence ; for one thing, the baronet appeared less reserved and more friendly ; and, for another, Ferrers was lustily primed with food and drink, and emboldened with the advice given him by Lord Debrett.

"Dawlish," said Debrett, leaning well back in his lounge-chair and stretching his long legs—all three being provided with the accompaniments of a smoking-room lounge—"my friend Ferrers wants something to do : he's doosid hard-up. Can you recommend him anything ?"

"Well," said Sir William, with a smile that seemed to Ferrers more like a grin : it showed all his teeth—"well," said he, "if Mr. Ferrers will excuse my saying it—he had the look when I first saw him of a hard-up man. I've had a large experience, continued he with another grin, "of hard-up people : I'm commonly one of them myself."

"But can you recommend him to anything?" asked Lord Debrett. "He's a good fellow ; he can always hold his tongue and keep his head."

"An excellent character to have," said Sir William,

nodding and grinning ; “and I have no doubt he deserves it.”

“He is too confoundedly civil,” thought Ferrers. “What does he mean by it?”

“Of course he does,” said Lord Debrett. “I wasn’t paying a compliment ; I was merely recommending a good man.”

“But what,” asked Sir William, “is Mr. Ferrers’ line?”

“I am a yeoman’s son,” said Ferrers, speaking for himself, with a frank touch of pride, “and I know something of farming ; and I’ve served my twelve years in the Blues, from private to sergeant——”

“And he knows all that can be learned in the Guards,” broke in Debrett, “and a good deal more besides.”

“And how’s the education, may I ask?” said Sir William.

“Oh, that’s all right,” said Debrett again before Ferrers could reply ; “besides drawing, calisthenics, and the use of the globes, and all that sort of thing.—But have you something in your eye, Dawlish, that might occupy any of Ferrers’ talents?”

“I have a notion of something that would need a good many talents—one in particular.”

"Ah, now," said Debrett, "there's something at last ;" while Ferrers feared it might be something he had already tried.

Sir William looked at him with a smile, and said : "Mr. Ferrers, I suppose, is an old enough soldier to carry out instructions without demanding an explanation ?"

"I should think so," answered Debrett.—"Eh, Ferrers ?"

"Certainly I am," said Ferrers.

"But what's on, Dawlish ?" asked Debrett. "Not a burglary or an abduction, eh ?"

"You're not so good a soldier as Mr. Ferrers," said Sir William, grinning again : "you want an explanation."

"But I'm not going to take service," answered the other.

"Well," said Sir William, when he had considered a moment, "it's neither a burglary nor an abduction ; it's neither more nor less than a game I want to play with some wealthy and hard-fisted connections of mine in the City.—I had a brother," he continued, leaning forward, to Lord Debrett, while his eye constantly turned to Ferrers, "who made a pile of money as a banker. All his property was left in

charge of his two partners—stupid, precise, old City men—and it's with them I have a little game on; and I have been thinking that Mr. Ferrers might help me in it. I don't mind telling you in confidence that there is a lady concerned: a soldier is always ready to help a lady."

"What do you say, Ferrers?" asked Debrett.

"Oh," said Ferrers, "I'm quite ready to have any game that's not against the law, with jokers of that sort."

"I'll take care of the law," said Sir William with a grin. "Now," said he, considering his finger-nails a moment, "for your help in this business I can afford to give you a hundred pounds and your expenses. You're not above taking money for a service rendered, I suppose, Mr. Ferrers?"

"Unfortunately, I cannot afford to be," said Ferrers.

"That's all right. Will my suggestion, then, suit you?"

"Perfectly," said Ferrers. "But I hope, Sir William, you won't think it too early if I ask you now what you want me to do."

"It's quite necessary," said Sir William politely, "and by no means premature. I want you to call

yourself 'William Dawlish,' and, to use what I believe is a vulgar phrase, to behave as such. That's all."

"William Dawlish?" said Ferrers. "I am supposed to be your son. Is that it?"

"We are not responsible for what people may suppose. But I perceive, Mr. Ferrers, in your question a tendency to overdo it."

"What I said," remarked Debrett parenthetically. "Don't overdo it, Ferrers."

"No; don't," said Sir William. "It will be as well not to *say* you are my son, because you are *not*."

"So far as you know, Dawlish," suggested Lord Debrett.

"So far," assented Sir William, "as I know."

"I begin to understand," said Ferrers. "I must play the game of 'William Dawlish' with plain cards."

"With plain cards as much as possible," assented Sir William. "If anyone, for instance, should ask you point-blank, 'Are you Sir William Dawlish's son?' you'll play low and say, 'What has that to do with you?' or something of that sort. There are always people asking for information: your business

is *not* to give it 'em. And always remember that whatever you do or say I've got to back you up in it—if it come to that ; so I must rely on you not to compromise me."

"Let me ask you, Sir William," said Ferrers, "this one thing more : there is nothing illegal, nothing wrong, no real damage to anyone, I mean, in this game?"

"Nothing whatever," said Sir William. "You will have to act a fib for my sake, and especially for the sake of a certain lady. I have no precise instructions at present ; only prepare to be William Dawlish."

"I think, Sir William, I begin to see the thing," said Ferrers. He was still perplexed ; but he was afraid to appear stupid by asking questions.

"Now," said Sir William, producing a cheque-book and a Livermore pen, "I'll give you a cheque for fifty pounds on account of expenses.—You must dress properly, you know" (with a glance at Ferrers' rough tweed suit, which made him blush), "and you must get a proper address and visiting-cards with 'Mr. William Dawlish' on them."

"By Jove," exclaimed Lord Debrett, "this is going to be sport !"

"But remember," said Sir William with warning pen, "it is strictly between us three."

"Oh, mum's the word," said Lord Debrett.

"There will be no difficulty, I suppose," said Sir William to Ferrers, "about leaving your present lodgings?"

"None at all," said Ferrers.

"Well," said Sir William, "drive up to my rooms, No. — Jermyn Street, in a hansom at twelve o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Oh, I shall come to breakfast, Dawlish!" exclaimed Lord Debrett.

"Do," said Sir William.—"And," continued he to Ferrers, "have a good, big, stout portmanteau with you—not too new and not too light.—Now, Debrett," said he with another of his grins, glancing at the mantel-clock, "I think it's quite time we went."

They rose.—"Ah, by the way," said he, "that cheque is drawn on my late brother's bank. It is possible they may detain you to make inquiries;" and he grinned again. "But don't be disturbed: I'll make it all right."

"In that case," said Ferrers, "had I not better have a—a little loose cash, to make sure of keeping my morning appointment with you, Sir William?"

“That’s well bethought,” said Sir William ; and he took from his pocket-book a five-pound note and handed it to Ferrers.

Then they went out.

“What’s the game, I wonder ?” said Lord Debrett in Ferrers’ ear as he bade him “good-night.”

CHAPTER III.

DREW, DAWLISH, AND DRUMLY.

FERRERS walked away in a whirl of pleasant feeling. He put his hand into his pocket : it was long since—and it had not been often—he had felt the crisp touch of a bank-note. As he strode along, scarce knowing where he went, he thought he would like to smoke. He was tired of the old clay he carried in his pocket. He had money : he would buy a new pipe. He threw his clay away and ventured into a tobacconist's. It was only when he was in that he remembered it would be next to impossible for him to change a five-pound note that night in the region he frequented. He bought a pipe, however, nominally a briar, which was within the range of his remaining cash, and continued on his way. He wandered on ; in his exaltation, not quite perceiving where he was. It was still tolerably early, and many shops were still open. In passing a cheesemonger and buttermen's he remembered that he had no butter for

breakfast. He had his foot within the shop before he discovered that he had only twopence in his pocket. He thought, "I can get two ounces"—a quantity he had often heard asked for in his Soho region.

"Two ounces of your best fresh," said he, walking up to the counter.

"We don't make two ounces," said the young man, looking at him suspiciously.

"Don't you?" said Ferrers, and with a blush he was ready to turn away when he remembered Lord Debrett's advice: "You must come the old soldier; you must bounce."

"Then," said he recovering himself, "weigh me a quarter of a pound."

The shopman weighed that quantity, placed it on paper, and was about to wrap it up, when Ferrers proffered a request. "Will you be so good as to lend me a knife?" quoth he.

"Certainly," said the shopman, handing him a formidable carver.

"Allow me," said Ferrers, and drew the butter towards him. In a second he had cut the quarter in two with the knife, put the one part back on the scale and wrapped the other in the paper.

"Just to show you how to make two ounces," he added, putting down his money and striding leisurely out under the astonished stare of the shopman.

The complete success of his device surprised and amused him.

"That," he thought, "is evidently the way to do it. Don't make a fuss, but don't be put down. I see."

So he marched away to Soho in a meditative mood. He had not yet had time to take in completely that which had happened to him. He was to call himself "William Dawlish" and to appear as a gentleman. What could that mean? That he was going to be adopted by Sir William? Scarcely. The grinning baronet was not the man to have generous impulses of that sort. He was—unconsciously, he supposed—to perform some service—of an important kind, or else the baronet would not have offered him so much money and would not have been so secret. There was a lady concerned. He wondered what *that* might mean. Was she young or old or middle-aged? Was she maid, wife, or widow? He perceived, however, that if he indulged in such speculations on every hand he would probably spoil his business. He resolved that he would keep his mind

—for the present at least—off these things, and set himself to execute to the best of his ability the purpose for which he had been engaged.

“Call yourself William Dawlish, and behave as ‘sech.’ That’s all.” Yes; that was all. He had got but a line or two by way of a sketch, and he had to fill in a complete picture. Well, the best and the most he could arrange now was to keep his head cool and his wits awake and to tackle difficulties as they arose. So he went to bed and to sleep.

When he woke in the morning he reflected: “Yes; I’m William Dawlish, and I must behave as ‘sech.’”

William Dawlish, it was clear, must be quickly cut off from the associations of George Ferrers. So, when he had eaten his breakfast, he called his landlady and told her that he must go away at once. She was sorry: he had been such a “nice quiet gentleman.” He owed the old woman nothing—his room being paid for—but he felt something was due to her for her expressions of politeness. He asked her to get him his five-pound note changed, the more readily that in his experience such a document could not be cashed either at shop or public-house without the portentous formality of putting your name and ad-

dress on the back. She brought him the change, and he begged her to accept a shilling.

"Oh, thank you, sir," said she, with a little duck of her person, which was rather like the memory of a curtsy than a curtsy itself.

With such deference paid him, Ferrers felt as if he were already William Dawlish, though still in the dingy garret in Soho. He said, "Not at all," and began packing away his belongings in his carpet-bag. That occupation accomplished, he said "Good-bye" to his landlady and descended the stairs. As he was departing from the doorstep, he gave a quick glance back at the house, asking himself of a sudden whether that was the end of his poverty, or whether he might have to return to the frowsy garret he had left, or at least to another like it. Of course, he would prefer not to return; but if it were decreed that he should—well, he was not going to worry. Fortune's buffets and caresses he could bear with the same equal mind.

He had resolved what he would do first. He must array himself like a gentleman, and he had in his mind's eye how his friend Lord Debrett dressed. Sir William expected him to appear at twelve o'clock with a goodly portmanteau, in which he meant, no

doubt, that there should be a goodly store of proper clothing. He could not get an outfit and a portmanteau with five pounds ; but he knew of a well-filled shop in a quiet street where misfits from fashionable tailors were sold at a reasonable price, and where, he believed, he might buy at once a proper suit to stand up in and also a sufficient portmanteau. Now, what kind of suit should be his first? Sir William had abstained from explanations and directions ; but was it not plain he desired him to appear as if fresh from a journey? On entering, therefore, the shop of misfits, he demanded a travelling suit of serge or tweed. He tried several, for, being a tall fellow, he was not easy to fit. At length he decided on a fine serge, which he asked to be allowed to put on. Before, however, withdrawing to the back-room pointed out to him as the place where he might effect a change, he turned to the shopman. "I want a portmanteau," said he : "large and good, but not too new. You have such things, haven't you?"

"Oh, yessir," said the man.—"Now, here's a fine solid-leather article ; we bought it of a gentleman going to India. That ought to suit you to a 'T.'"

"Yes," said Ferrers. "But here's another that will do for me, I think." He had determined on it

because it bore two large initials, "W. B."—the latter of which he saw at once could be readily changed into a "D."

"Yessir," said the man, "that's a very serviceable article ; but it's not so good as this."

"It will suit me very well," replied Ferrers, "if you will get that 'B' changed into 'D.' Rub that middle bit out and round off the back. Can you do that at once?"

"Oh, yessir."

Ferrers withdrew to the little back-room to change his clothes. That done, he put his head out and demanded a new hat—a brown one, round and of hard felt.

"Is that portmanteau ready?" he asked.

It was—almost. When it was, he requested it to be set down in the little room.

"I want to put in these things I've taken off," said he.

He not only folded in the things he had taken off, but also crammed in his carpet-bag and all its contents, thinking that simplified matters a little. Then it occurred to him that, since he was supposed to have made a journey, he ought to be provided with some sort of overcoat. He had not, however, sufficient

money left for that ; so he had reluctantly to forego so complete a presentation of his part as he thought he ought to make.

“I ought really,” he also thought to himself, “to take a cab from some station, and there should be labels on my portmanteau ; but I suppose these things can’t matter.”

A hansom was called for him, his portmanteau was hoisted up, and he got in saying to the driver : “Drew, Dawlish and Drumly’s Bank in Lombard Street.”

When the bank was reached, he told cabby to wait, and descended to undergo his first ordeal. He remembered that Sir William had said with a grin that he might be “detained” at the bank ; and with, it must be confessed, a curious heave of feeling that passed from his ample chest down to somewhere about the second button of his waistcoat, he wondered what was going to happen. He was not afraid ; but he thought, “What if the whole thing should end here ? What if somebody should say, “You’re an impostor !” and send for the police ? And with a glance back at the cab, he wished he had taken it from some station ; for would it not betray him if cabby were questioned and answered truly where he had driven from ?

He entered the bank as carelessly as he could, and walked up to a part of the counter whence he saw the word "Cashier" staring roundly. He took out his purse to produce the cheque, and was at once smitten with chagrin to think that his little purse looked shabby, and that the cheque should have been taken from a well-filled pocket-book with gilt initials or monogram on the back. He was relieved to note that nobody seemed to remark from what he took the cheque, that no one took any notice of him till he leaned on the counter and drummed with his fingers. Then a bald-headed man—a disconcerting man, who looked at him as if he had known his father and grandfather and remembered all the peccadillos of his youth—looked round from a desk where he sat over an enormous book, and held out his hand without a word. Ferrers gave him the cheque. He looked at it on the front, glanced at its blank back, and then got down from his stool and looked straight at Ferrers. "Mr. Dawlish?" said he in a sepulchral voice of inquiry.

Ferrers inclined his head a little, scarce knowing what to do.

"Will you wait a moment, please, Mr. Dawlish?" said the man, and disappeared.

What next? thought Ferrers, with another flutter beneath his waistcoat. He looked about him, curled his fine moustaches, and tried to look unconscious of evil. Presently he became aware that some one was looking at him very hard through a glass partition a little way off. What now? He was surprised by the appearance, through a door in the glass partition, of a good-humoured, dapper, little old gentleman, who came straight up to him with a winning smile and the inquiry he had already heard from the bald-headed man—"Mr. Dawlish?"

Again Ferrers bowed in reply—this time a little more resolutely.

"Dear me!" said the little gentleman, looking his stalwart person up and down. "And how are you?" he asked heartily, extending his hand, which Ferrers took and gripped. "Dear me!" he exclaimed again, glancing at his soft white hand, when released from Ferrer's vice. "Will you step into this room?"

"Will you walk into my parlour?" thought Ferrers with a new sinking of heart.

"I wish I knew," he said to himself, "whether there's a real William Dawlish—and what he is and what he's like!"

He entered the back parlour with the dapper little

gentleman, and found himself face to face with another person, who looked so ugly and surly, so silent, so watchful, and so overgrown with hair, that it was difficult to decide at a glance whether he was an old man or a grey gorilla.

"He must be the spider!" thought Ferrers. "Now for it! But he'll find me a big fly to tackle!"

"My partner, Mr. Drumly," said the dapper little gentleman with a flourish of his white hand. "And I'm Mr. Drew, at your service. Be seated."

Mr. Drumly said nothing, but looked a great deal from under his shaggy brows. Ferrers sat in an attitude of expectation, determined not to commit himself.

"I hope, Mr. Dawlish," said Mr. Drew, a little uneasily, "that we're not detaining you?"

"My cab's waiting," said Ferrers; "but that's of no consequence."

"The fact is," said Mr. Drew, in a little burst of confidence, "that Sir William has overdrawn a leetle bit, and the cashier brought your cheque to us."

"I'm sorry," said Ferrers, "that it's not all right."

"Not at all," said Mr. Drew; "we'll make it all right. Glad on the whole that it has happened, since it has introduced us to you."

"Is Sir William very well?" asked Mr. Drumly, speaking for the first time, and in a voice that sounded to Ferrers like the buzz of a blue-bottle in the toils of a spider.

"As far as I know," answered Ferrers.

"*You* are looking well," came from Mr. Drumly, and there was a lifting of the heavy gorilla brows that seemed to suggest that a smile was hid somewhere under the abundant hair.

"Thank you," said Ferrers; "*I am* well."

"Mr. Drumly, you know," said Mr. Drew, with an indulgent smile towards his partner, "goes in for Health; he believes in it; it's a creed, a hobby, with him."

"Health," said Mr. Drumly, and the buzzing of his voice was then very loud indeed, "is everything. It is better than Wealth; it is better than Rank. With Health a man may do anything; and with *fine* Health——"

"And Honesty," suggested Drew (while Ferrers wondered if there was any suspicion of his honesty).

"And Honesty," continued Drumly, accepting the suggestion with a little gruffness, "a man is the **most** god-like creature under the sun."

"**He is**; he is," said Mr. Drew, looking at Ferrers

with approval, and running his eye up and down his stalwart person.

Ferrers stretched out his long legs, leaned back in his chair, and expanded his chest, to give the full effect of himself.

"Yes ; a healthy man that has a fine, well-grown figure and an honest heart," repeated Mr. Drumly, "is the Royalty of Manhood."

"Like Saul, you know," said Mr. Drew.

Ferrers forgot who Saul was, but he wondered if he had an honest heart ; *he* scarcely felt as if he had, in the presence of these flattering old gentlemen.

"I suppose so," said he, by way of saying something.

"You appear," said Mr. Drew, smiling, "to take your fine health now as a matter of course."

Ferrers took alarm ; had he been playing his part improperly ?

"Well," said he, "you see I've had good health so long that I—I forget——"

"That's only as it should be," said Mr. Drew. "But you were very queer before you went away, were you not ?"

"Yes," said Ferrers, "I suppose I was ; I daresay I was."

"But don't you remember?" insisted Mr. Drew.

"It is likely he doesn't," said Mr. Drumly. "Why should he? You forget, Mr. Drew."

"Ah, yes; to be sure," said Mr. Drew.

What could it be Mr. Drew forgot?

"And then," said Mr. Drumly again, "he's been travelling a long while."

"Yes, of course," assented Mr. Drew. "Let's see, Mr. Dawlish; how long have you been away altogether?"

"How long?" repeated Ferrers. Yes; how long had he been away? That was a poser! "Let me see," he murmured, curling his moustaches in a whirl of perplexity.

"A matter of two years, I should think?" suggested Mr. Drew.

"Yes," said Ferrers, eagerly seizing the suggestion; "that's about it."

"And you went straight off to the East, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Ferrers, pulling his self-possession together; "to the Mediterranean and the East."

"Did you happen," asked Mr. Drew, "to see anything of the Egyptian trouble?"

Now Ferrers felt he must make a direct statement:

he must risk it, and let Sir William know what he had said. "Oh, yes," said he. "I was in most of it—up the Nile and across the desert with the Desert Column."

"Were you, indeed?" exclaimed Mr. Drew. "But I thought you had left the army long ago?"

"Ah, yes," said Ferrers; "but they let me serve as—a volunteer, you know." There seemed to him nothing for it but a plain falsehood; and being in for it, he continued: "I was by the side of Lord Debrett all the time."

They were interested: and they put to him several questions which he was, of course, able from his actual experience to answer sufficiently and categorically. They were clearly pleased with him, and his self-confidence was completely restored.

"I fear," said Mr. Drew at length, "that we have trespassed terribly on your time. But you will excuse us. We have been very glad to make your acquaintance, and we hope we shall meet again soon."

"I hope we shall," said Ferrers heartily: he liked the old men, for he was leaving their presence pleased with himself.

The cash of his cheque had already been placed ready for him, and he took it and departed. He was

about to step into the waiting cab, when Mr. Drew appeared at his side and hastily laid his hand on his arm. He was invaded by the sudden thought that he was found out.

“Excuse me,” said Mr. Drew ; “but will you give me your address? We may want to communicate with you.”

“To be sure,” said Ferrers. He put his hand to this pocket and that. “I have not a card about me ; but Number —, Jermyn Street, will find me for some time.”

“Ah,” said Mr. Drew ; “the same address as Sir Williams’, of course?”

“Yes ; the same.”

They repeated their adieus, and Ferrers entered the cab. Seeing that it was already more than half-past eleven, he ordered cabby to drive to Jermyn Street.

He was surprised—almost amazed—with his success. He had not imagined he could have so easily got himself taken for granted as William Dawlish, and by business men, too, who saw all kinds of people and who must be prone to suspicion. He was inclined to be vain. He admired above all things a gentleman like Lord Debrett, and it very naturally

puffed him up to be taken by strangers for that kind of person.

When he arrived at the house in Jermyn Street, he was shown at once into Sir William's sitting-room on the first floor ; for it appeared that the baronet had only lodgings there.

"Well," cried Lord Debrett, who was smoking at the window, "how have you got on, Ferrers? Have you nobbled the old boys?"

"I think I have," said Ferrers ; and he proceeded to relate, with a subdued glee, how he had been received and entertained with conversation in the bank parlour.

"And didn't they offer you never a drop of their fine City drinks?" asked Lord Debrett.

"Never a drop," said Ferrers.

"Give him a drink now, Debrett," said Sir William with a grin. "He seems to me to deserve it."

"And remember, if you please, Debrett," said Ferrers, "that I was a volunteer in the Soudan."

There was a knock at the door, and a man-servant entered with a note on a tray ; it had just come, he said, by hand. Sir William passed it on to Ferrers with a snigger.

"For you, I believe," said he.

It was addressed to "Wm. Dawlish, Esquire;" and it proved to be a card of invitation to a dance that very night at the house of Mr. Drew, in Park Lane. Ferrers handed it back to Sir William.

"That's quick work," said the baronet. "I suppose Drew telegraphed home at once to send the invitation.—You must have fetched him," he remarked, with a certain look of admiration at the Life-guardsman's good-humoured face. "You must go. Can you dance?"

"Tolerably," said Ferrers.

"Ah, well, then," said Sir William "we'll manage."

CHAPTER IV.

DOLLY.

THE genial Mr. Drew, the wealthy banker, entertained very splendidly. The ballroom of the evening was a lofty marquee on the lawn of the little garden of his house. It was hung with blush-rose silk, and floored compactly with polished oak, and thereafter adorned with ample cool green shrubs, between which were set silk and velvet lounges; and it was illumined with electric lamps enclosed in Chinese lanterns, which subdued the light to a pleasant tone, so that the palest and most weary guests looked fresh and blooming.

Ferrers stood with Lord Debrett by one of the exits into the garden. They had arrived early, Ferrers pleading for that arrangement so that he might "find his feet," as he said, before the crowd of people came. Sir William was coming, but he was not yet come.

"I'm rather afraid of this, you know," said Ferrers. "I wish I hadn't come. I don't feel at home in these

togs. I feel as if I looked like a waiter or a fool. If I were a little chap, I wouldn't mind ; I wouldn't be noticed."

"Oh, there's nothing to be scared about," said Lord Debrett. "You'll be all right."

"Now tell me truly," said Ferrers—"don't I look an awkward beggar?"

"You look first chop," said Lord Debrett promptly. —"Come and have a glass of champagne ; that'll steady your nerves."

They went to the buffet in the supper-room.

"You've got to dance, you know," said Lord Debrett.

"Sir William," said Ferrers, "seemed to think that after all I'd better not. He particularly wants me not to dance with Miss Dawlish."

"Miss Dawlish? What Miss Dawlish? Not his old sister?"

"I suppose not," said Ferrers ; "but I don't know. He's a close old joker."

"He is," said Debrett. "I don't know what his game is at all. But if there's another Miss Dawlish—a young un—it may be about her. Don't you remember he said it concerned a lady? I never heard he had a daughter, though."

"Maybe his banker brother left a daughter," suggested Ferrers.

"That must be it!" exclaimed Lord Debrett. "But at any rate you dance. You'd like a spin with a nice girl, wouldn't you?"

"I would," said Ferrers at once; his self-confidence was rapidly returning under the stimulus of the generous, foaming liquor he drank.

"Very well," said Lord Debrett. "Let's go down."

As they left the room, Ferrers saw two tall, distinguished gentlemen of about the same height and the same handsomeness of figure—both set off by their well-fitting evening dress—come straight towards them. He had taken a step to stand aside in order to let them pass, when he stood stock-still. "By Jingo!" he exclaimed. It was himself and Lord Debrett reflected in a tall glass near the door! He curled his moustaches and passed on, well satisfied with his appearance.

He had barely returned into the ballroom—where there was now a considerable throng—when he was met by Mrs. Drew, a comfortable City lady with a Roman nose, to whom he had been introduced on his arrival.

"I've been looking for you, you naughty man,"

said she. "I want to introduce you to your cousin Dolly."

He was led without any objection on his part towards a young lady who stood fanning herself and talking with a gentleman. She turned as they approached and awaited their coming with an evidently lively interest. She was not tall—she would stand no higher than Ferrers' chest—but she was plump, comely, and bright-eyed. Mrs. Drew introduced them.

"Now I'll leave you," said she. "It must be a great many years since you two have met, and you must have a great deal to say to each other—and you must dance."

Ferrers had nothing whatever to say, and Dolly did not help him, for she was shy. But he had sufficient presence of mind to be aware that under these circumstances the best thing was to ask her to dance.

"They have just begun a waltz," said he. "You are not engaged for it?"

"No," said she.

"May I—?" he asked.

She took his arm; they stepped out; and away they went. Ferrers thought her most sweet and

adorable. As they swung round easily in time with the music, in the close contact of the waltz, Ferrers' awkwardness vanished, and he began to talk.

"It must be a great many years since we met," said he, making a brave dash at a leading question.

"Oh, yes," said she. "I don't think we've met since I was a little girl and you were a big boy just done with school.—You hadn't much of a moustache then," she continued, glancing up at him.

"No," said he; "but I daresay I shaved hard to get one."

"And you must have stretched hard, too, to grow tall," said she, with a merry little laugh. "I never expected to find you so big."

"Oh," said he. "I hope I'm not too big. Shall I try to grow smaller? I've been afraid for a long time there was too much of me."

"Don't be foolish," said she. "Of course you're not too big."

"If *you* don't think me too big, I don't care," said he, and he tingled throughout his frame with the thought of having uttered something delicious and daring.

She blushed a little, and was silent; and he was silent too.

Presently the waltz came to an end, Ferrers feeling he had not had nearly enough of it, and forgetting, in Dolly's charming company, Sir William's request that he would not dance with Miss Dawlish.

"Don't you think," he asked, "that we might have another dance together?"

"I don't know," said she, as he led her to a seat. "Not the next one, at any rate. That might seem too noticeable, even though we are cousins."

"Oh, yes," said he; "the next one, please."

"Why?" she asked; and there was the flush of health on her cheek and the sparkle of challenge in her eye.

"Why?" said he. "Don't you guess that I should like to be with you as long as possible?"

She said nothing, but she blushed divinely; and soon another dance—a waltz again—was struck up.

"I'm glad it's a waltz," said he, as they swung away in the sensuous, intoxicating motion: "it lets you talk without bothering your head about all kinds of figures and turns and twists."

"I suppose," said she, with apparent irrelevance,

“when boys grow up to be men they always improve?”

“They ought to,” said he. “But why do you say that?”

“Because I think you are so much nicer than you used to be.”

“Am I?” said he, with a certain sense of triumph over his other, his former self, the real William Dawlish.

“You don’t remember, I daresay,” said she, “what a spoiled, sulky boy you were; how, whenever I was down at Dawlish Place, you used to tease me and my dog, and not let me look at the treasures of pipes and things you kept in a box——”

“What?” said Ferrers, unconsciously identifying himself with the person spoken of. “Did I smoke then?”

“Oh, yes. Don’t you remember that? You even smoked nasty tobacco with the horrid stable-boy and the gardener’s boy.”

“What a disagreeable fellow!” exclaimed Ferrers with feeling.

“Well,” said she, with a woman’s tender talent for excuse of those she is interested in, “seventeen is a disagreeable age. It is eight years since then——”

"I'm twenty-five, am I?" thought he, with a troublesome consciousness that he was five years more than that.

"And you have seen and done a great many things, and suffered many things, too—haven't you?"

"Yes; I suppose I have."

"I daresay," said she, with a half-shy, half-defiant glance up at him, "I was not nice then, either."

"I am sure," said he, "you were always nice."

"I don't believe you remember," said she, with a laugh, "whether I was or not!"

He was prevented from replying by the sudden qualm of concern which seized him on noting, as they whirled round, that Sir William had arrived and was regarding him with no very pleasant aspect, while he bent over a shrivelled duenna with a curious glittering head-dress!

"Who is that," he asked of Dolly, "that Sir William is talking to? I can't see very well."

"Why, don't you know? That's Aunt Dawlish. Have you forgotten her?"

"Bless me!" he exclaimed. "Is that Aunt Dawlish?"

“And why,” she asked, “do you call your father ‘Sir William?’”

“He is Sir William?”

“Of course ; but it sounds odd for you to call him that.”

“I suppose it does. I’ve got into the way of it without thinking.”

He was glad that at that moment she proposed to slip from the whirl of waltzers to cool herself in the outer air of the garden. He marked, ere they went, where Sir William stood—talking about him, he was convinced, by the look he had noted—and then, when they were out, he led her towards the spot which he had marked with his eye. He found a garden chair for her, while himself leaned against one of the slim poles of the marquee. His experience of camp-life had taught him how to overhear a conversation within a tent. With his pocket-knife he made a slit in the canvas wall and leaned his ear into it. His chance cut was a good one. He found he was immediately against Sir William’s shoulder.

“The young man,” said Sir William, “will give no trouble ; he’s as docile as a dog—though I *did* tell him not to dance with Dolly. When this is settled,

I'll give him his *cong  *, and he'll never know what he was used for."

"I hope he's as simple as you think him," said the lady. "He doesn't look to me as if he were."

("And he isn't, ma'am !" thought Ferrers.)

"But at any rate," continued the lady, "I can have nothing to say to him."

"But you must," declared Sir William with energy. "Listen to me."

And Ferrers heard no more.

"I hear you have only just arrived from abroad," said Dolly ; "but I suppose you know we are going down to Dawlish Place next week !"

"Yes," said he : I've heard of it." ("But only this minute," he thought.)

"You'll be there, won't you ?"

"Oh, yes ; I expect I shall be there."

Whether, because she thought him becoming dull and unresponsive, or because it was time—the music and the dance ceasing at that moment—Dolly said she wished to go in. Ferrers gave her his arm.

"Take me to Aunt Dawlish," said she.

But as they approached Aunt Dawlish, that lady rose with a great commotion of the glittering and dangling ornaments of her head-dress and fluttered

away. Dolly incontinently left Ferrers' arm and hurried after her, saying : "What's the matter, aunt?" Ferrers turned and looked at Sir William, who was lowering and showing his teeth.

"I asked you," said Sir William, "not to dance with Miss Dawlish."

"I couldn't help it," said Ferrers. "Mrs. Drew introduced us."

Sir William nodded once or twice half-absently, and then moved away after the ladies without another word. Ferrers was hurt and angry. He turned and marched out into the garden. He sat down in the chair Dolly had occupied and chewed his moustache. Presently his attention was seized by some desultory talk he overheard. Two or three young men stood a little way off smoking cigarettes.

"They tell me," said one, "that was young Dawlish—that whacking six-footer—dancing with his cousin Dolly."

"Nonsense," said another—"not Sir Billy's rip of a son ! He used to look like a long monkey up a stick !"

"Fact, though," said the first. "He's been away somewhere for years—exploring Central Asia or Central Africa or Central America"—

“Central *something*, I’ll be bound,” laughed the other. “And he’s lost all his monkeyness.”

“It’ll take me a long time to get used to the idea that that big chap is the Will Dawlish I once knew,” said the other. “I always thought he’d gone cracked—wrong in his upper story, you know.”

“Tom,” said a third, “you always get hold of the wrong end of a thing. Even at school, you were always getting your book upside down and taking hold of your private frying-pan by anything but the handle. He went wrong, but not in the head. What’s the confounded rhyme? You know—‘In consequence of which he was ruined *totally*, and married a lady in the *corps de ballet*.’”

“Oh, that’s it, is it?” thought Ferrers. “If there’s a real William Dawlish in existence, he is married already, it appears.”

And he rose and slipped away. He entered the marquee, but he did not linger there. He passed through it into the supper-room and went to the buffet. While standing there, he turned and saw a black-muzzled man, not in evening dress—the very man he had dropped the evening before into the basin in Trafalgar Square—curiously regarding him! He wondered, with a sudden quickening of alarm,

if he were now to be found out. Had he, when he talked to the man, betrayed that he had been a private soldier? He could not remember, though he did not think he had. In any case, he thought it prudent to withdraw. And so, without stopping to consider whether it was "good form" or not, he got his hat and coat and left the house.

CHAPTER V.

BEFORE THE ACTION.

FERRERS as he walked away felt angry and humiliated. He was not usually a vainly longing person. He had been well content to serve in his humble rank as a soldier, and to have Lord Debrett for a friend without wishing to be taken as Lord Debrett's equal. He would have been satisfied to go on like that; but to be set up as a gentleman by one hand and taken down by another was "not good enough," as he said to himself. To be introduced to a very nice girl—to a young lady, indeed—and then to be rudely pushed away from her, was especially a thing that no right-minded man could endure. He felt very much inclined to "kick over the traces" (to use his own words), to pull Sir William's nose and call him an insolent jackanapes, and then throw up the whole business. He was as well disciplined and docile a soldier as could be, except where his heart was concerned, and about that he had never been asked to accept dictation or discipline.

So he marched along fuming, marched till his anger had become fainter ; and then he went to the house in Jermyn Street—next door to Sir William's own lodging—where the baronet had secured him a bedroom.

Next morning, his resentment was gone. He was himself again—the cheerful, alert, and self-reliant soldier. Whilst shaving and dressing he turned over in his mind all his talk with Miss Dawlish, and the conversations relating to himself which he had overheard the evening before—that of Sir William and his sister, and that of the “Johnnies.” He experienced a certain fierceness of resentment at the thought that personally he must hold aloof from any tender fancies about the charming Dolly. If the “Johnnies” were to be believed, he was playing the part of a man who some years ago had been cracked in reputation if not in head. And if Sir William and his sister were to be believed, the baronet was playing a very risky game, in which he, Ferrers, was intended to be an ignorant tool, to be thrown aside as soon as done with. Naturally, Ferrers did not quite approve of that. He owed Sir William neither love nor—so far as he could see—gratitude ; and he was therefore determined to find

out the secret of his game, and have, if possible, the "pull" of Sir William, when that grinning gentleman should show a desire to cast him off.

"What," he asked himself, "does he really want with me?" He arrested the razor on his cheek to consider a suspicion that rose before him. "I believe," he declared to himself, "the real W. D. is dead, and he wants to work me off as his son, to get somehow at that money his banker-brother left!"

The more he examined that suspicion, the more he got convinced of its truth, and—as is the way of men—resolved to find evidence in support of it; so he made up his mind to wait, and watch, and see, to be no party to doing wrong to anyone—if he should discover that was being attempted—and at the same time, as became an old campaigner, not to suffer grievous damage himself.

He went to breakfast with Sir William, and the baronet was fairly affable, but quite close about his business.

"Here," said he, with a grin, "is another invitation for you—from Drumly—for to-morrow afternoon—a conversazione or some nonsense of that sort. You'd better go; you'll get on all right, as you did last night. The only thing I have to ask of you is

not to hold conversation with Miss Dawlish—if she's there."

"Very well," said Ferrers.

Ferrers went to the conversazione. What it was about, he neither knew nor cared ; but he saw strange glass cases in the drawing-room, containing specimens or representations of grains, pulse, and fruits, and he saw a little book called *How to live on Sixpence a Day*, and he thought, "I know ; I've done it ; but I'd rather not." Dolly was there, but so was Aunt Dawlish. He thought Dolly regarded him wistfully from afar off, and he worked slowly round the room to be near her. He passed close to her and glanced at her.

"How d'ye do, cousin?" she said. But she did not move ; she scarcely looked as if she had spoken.

"I am told," said he, much in the same manner, "that I must not hold conversation with you. Why?—I don't know."

"Isn't it absurd?" said she, still without turning. "Aunt Dawlish has told *me* I mustn't talk to *you*. What for? I wonder. Have you offended her? She used to be always praising you to me."

"Aunt Dawlish," said Ferrers aside, "is an old catamaran !"

"Yes," said Dolly, angrily turning her eyes, but nought else. "Isn't she an old frump? Old maids are always like that, I suppose. I hate them!"

"Good-bye," said Ferrers.

"Good-bye, cousin," said Dolly rather plaintively.

Aunt Dawlish had always been praising him until now—praising, that is, the other, the mysterious, the unknown, the "cracked" in reputation or in head—the probably dead—Will Dawlish! That was another fact to be taken note of and pondered.

While he turned over and pondered these things, and paced solemnly about the room, he remarked the black-muzzled Irish-American, whom he had soused in the fountain, and whom he had seen at Mr. Drew's the evening before. He moved about as if burdened with the cares of office. It was clear, then, that he was in the service of either Drew or Drumly, or that he served the two masters, either of which conclusions was disconcerting; for it seemed likely that he would encounter the man frequently. Indeed, he was presently both disconcerted and surprised to see the man approach him and to hear him say: "Mr. Dawlish?"—with a look, Ferrers thought, of suspicion and incredulity.

"Yes," said Ferrers.

"Mr. Drumly," said the man, "has sent me to find you. He wants to speak to you."

"What now?" thought Ferrers, as he worked his way after the man.

"Ah, here you are," said Drumly when they met at the end of the room. "I'm very glad to see you."

Drumly grasped Ferrers' hand with such cordiality, and looked up at him with so simple an admiration, that the young man was touched with shame to think he was doing anything to deceive so frank and kindly a soul.

"Let us have a turn round," said Drumly, taking Ferrers' arm: "I can't move about much by myself."

Ferrers had not seen Drumly on his feet before; and on looking down now, he perceived that one leg was shorter than the other, and that it ended in a stilted boot, with a sole six inches thick. Then the strong young man understood the pathos of the old man's admiration of Health, and he experienced an impulse of passionate desire to aid him with his health and strength; though—it at once occurred to him—it was absurd of a plain penniless soldier to think of being anything to a wealthy banker. He could at least, he thought, be honest and frank with the old man, and he came very near at that moment

to saying : "I understand you ; I understand your admiration of me ; but I don't deserve it ! I am not the person you think I am ! I am a fraud—an impostor !" Yet, he reflected, why should he make a fuss ? He had up till now done no harm to the old man, and he hoped he would do none ; and to blurt out a confession could only mean disgrace and ruin to himself. These impulses and hesitations passed over him without leaving a shade on his face, which steadily beamed down on the old man with a tender and protective regard.

"I want to have a look at the cases with you," said Drumly, smiling up at him ; while Ferrers wondered that so ugly a gorilla face could look so pleasant. "I call this a Health Conversazione, you know. That's why I asked you ; you ought to be set up on a pedestal as the full expression of the whole thing."

"And are these things," asked Ferrers, beginning to look at the contents of the cases, "supposed to be the food I've been brought up on ?"

"Not exactly—not exactly," said Drumly ; "or, at least, not directly. You've been fed on beef and bread and such-like, and bread is from wheat, and beef is grass wonderfully worked up."

"And turnips and hay and chopped straw—oh, yes," said Ferrers.

"You know something of farming, then?" said Drumly, looking at him with fresh interest.

"A good deal," said Ferrers, forgetting for the moment his *rôle* of Will Dawlish. "I could take over the management of a farm to-morrow and work it, I think, at a profit."

"Bless me!" exclaimed Drumly, stopping to look at him. "You're quite accomplished! But how on earth did you learn farming to that extent?"

"Oh, I picked it up here and there."

"Well, really," said Drumly, "if you're so good at it, you'd better get Sir William to let you manage the estate, now that you've come home: it needs you, I believe."

That was all the allusion he made to family matters; but they continued to talk of grain and pulse (Drumly was anxious to know if Egyptian lentils could be grown in England); and the more they talked the more they were manifestly drawn to each other by the warmth of a mutual regard.

Dolly and Ferrers did not meet again that day; but they met the next and the next. Ferrers, however, could make no approach to Dolly, for Sir William's

or Miss Dawlish's watchful eye was ever on him. Why did Sir William think it of so much consequence that he should not speak to her?

Of course, those who have known much of the ways of young men and young women will at once perceive that of all methods that was about the best to make these two young people wish to be near each other. Ferrers, who could not be blind to the fact that Dolly approved of him, was chafing to be near her ; and Dolly's wistful glances and melancholy face told plainly that she was longing to have her cousin by her side. Ferrers never troubled to consider whether honour or anything of that sort forbade him to think of Dolly ; what man when really involved has ever taken such matters into his consideration ?

Now, if it had been a case in which he was merely a spectator, Sir William would have seen what was likely to occur as quickly as any one ; but since it was a case in which he was prejudiced and wrapped up, he did not see it ; and therefore it happened that things fell out as they did.

The day soon came of which Dolly had forewarned Ferrers, when all the people concerned in this mysterious business were to assemble at Dawlish Place, Sir William's "seat" in Surrey.

"Ferrers," said Sir William one morning, "it is

just about the end of the season ; perhaps you don't know that ? ”

“ Oh, yes,” said Ferrers ; “ I know that.”

“ Very well. Before people have the excuse that they are off to-morrow or the day after to the Continent or to Scotland, I'm going to have a little party down for a week to Dawlish Place. I'm asking Drew and Drumly down, and you must come. I tell you now in confidence that the business I engaged you for is coming to a head. You've done very well so far. We've skirmished up hill now,” said he with a grin. “ Now, we're going to carry the enemy's position by assault.”

“ The enemy, I suppose,” said Ferrers, “ being Mr. Drew and Mr. Drumly ? ”

“ The enemy—on the whole—being Drew and Drumly.”

“ Very well,” said Ferrers. “ I'm ready to march. When do we go, may I ask ? ”

“ This afternoon ; by the 4.30 from Waterloo.”

Ferrers rather “ funked ”—I use the word he would have used himself—the visit to Dawlish Place. It was one thing to see “ swell ” people for an hour or two now and then ; it was quite another to spend a week constantly in their company. He doubted if

he could fulfil the requirements of his position. After breakfast he went to seek Lord Debrett, to get from him comfort and advice.

"Ah, Dawlish," said he, "how are you getting on?"

"Oh, all right," said Ferrers. When the man who had shown him in had withdrawn, he continued: "It makes me jump to hear myself called by that name."

"I couldn't help it before my man," said Debrett.

"I wish I were well out of this business," said Ferrers.

"Hallo! What's up?"

"I don't like Sir William, and I like Mr. Drumly; and if there's any harm meant against Drumly, I'll *have* to go against Sir William, though I'm in his pay."

"But why," asked Debrett, "do you think he means harm to old Drumly? I expect Dawlish wants to get at his late brother's property—for Miss Dawlish, very likely: you remember he said it was all for the sake of a lady. Perhaps she is being kept out of her rights."

"Drumly's not the man," said Ferrers, "to keep anybody out of his rights. The fact is I don't trust

Sir William. I'm in a funk about the whole business."

"That's bad. It's not like you to funk anything."

"I'm always in a funk before an action."

"Is there an action coming, then?"

"Don't you know? Drew, Drumly, and lots of other people, I suppose, are going down to Dawlish Place to-day; and I'm going, and Sir William says that will bring his business to a head."

"The deuce it will!"

"You're going down, I suppose?" asked Ferrers.

"Well, I've been asked," said Debrett; "but I thought I wouldn't bother."

"Oh, don't say that!" exclaimed Ferrers. "I've been depending on you to back me up. It may be my last action, Debrett, and I hope you'll stand by me."

"All right, old chap," said Lord Debrett; "since you put it like that, I will. I'll come down to-morrow."

"Come down to-day," urged Ferrers. "We take the 4.30 from Waterloo."

"Very well; to-day be it. Though I must break an engagement. I won't promise to take that train;

but I'll come down to-night in time for dinner, if possible."

"Thanks, very much," said Ferrers. "There's another thing. D'you think I must buy some special sort of togs to take down with me—shooting togs, for instance?"

"There'll be no shooting," said Debrett. "But I'll bring down things with me; and my things always suit you, you know."

So it came to pass that Ferrers went to Waterloo with Sir William, fortified with the hope of meeting Lord Debrett there; or, if not that, of seeing him appear at Dawlish Place by the following train.

CHAPTER VI.

AT DAWLISH PLACE.

DAWLISH PLACE was a fine old mansion, of a kind that abounds in the southern counties. It was straggling and low, having only two stories, and it was almost completely covered with ivy. Where the walls were visible it could be seen that they were built of, or at least faced with, flints ; and it had quaint high chimneys, which the clustering ivy made to appear like towers ; and irregular gables, which made cosy nooks, filled with warm sunshine, bright creeping flowers, and fluttering birds. It was set fair and free on the southern slope of the Surrey downs, with, before it, a sighing plantation of larches to shield it from the south-west weather sweeping up from the Channel ; and behind it, in the high distance, a wood of roaring and towering pines, which broke and baffled the northerly and easterly blasts of winter and spring. Between the house and the larch plantation, sloped and undulated, first a luxurious garden of roses and

other bright and scented flowers, and then an expanse of the greenest turf, with here and there a shady tree. Altogether, it looked as sweet, peaceful, and homely a "seat" as England could show. Ferrers, being country-bred and also something of an artist, had a good eye for rural effects.

"What a jolly place!" he exclaimed as he approached it with Sir William. "I should like to paint it."

"*Can* you paint?" asked Sir William, looking at him with fresh interest.

"Paint? Oh, yes; I can paint."

"Have you any of your things with you?"

"Yes; I have some sketches—mostly war sketches I made in Egypt. I haven't done much with landscape."

"That's capital," said Sir William. "Bring 'em out to-night—will you?—to show our visitors. It's sure to fetch 'em a good deal. A capital idea!" he exclaimed again.

"There's one thing, by the way," said Ferrers, "that I must ask you about. Am I still to avoid all conversation with Miss Dawlish?"

"Well," said Sir William; "no, not quite. I don't see how you can keep it up. You needn't avoid her,

but you needn't seek her out : you know what I mean."

" I think I do."

" Don't misunderstand me, Ferrers," said Sir William, in a burst of affability. " It's entirely on account of the—a—business I have in view."

" So I suppose," said Ferrers.

The ordeal which Ferrers especially dreaded—sitting down to dinner with a " lot " of people—came at length, and there had yet appeared no Debrett to sustain him in it. It proved, however—like most other troubles that we fear—worse in anticipation than in experience, though there occurred before it one thing that shook his confidence.

Ferrers had dressed, and reluctantly found his way to the drawing-room. When he entered, he saw that all he expected to meet were there, except Lord Debrett : Aunt Dawlish and Dolly, Mr. and Mrs. Drew, and his friend Drumly. The " lots of other people " he had feared meeting, if they were coming, were not yet come.

" Ah, here you are," said Sir William, avoiding the use of any name. " Mr. Drew and Mr. Drumly have been asking me about your doings in Egypt, and I've been telling them about your sketches. Would you mind getting them ? "

"Not at all," said Ferrers, and withdrew.

It was not till he stood in his room with the sketches in his hand that his eye reminded him that they were all signed "G. F." What was to be done? He could not obliterate the initials. He must invent some reason for them. He would say—— Yes; he was resolved what he would say; and down he went with the portfolio under his arm.

They were much admired by both ladies and gentlemen: they were "fine," "spirited," "capital," and all the rest.

"Is that you," whispered Dolly, "on that great long-legged, long-necked camel?"

"Yes; that's me," said Ferrers.

But Mr. Drew was taken up with a spirited representation of a section of the fight at Abu Kru.

"Bless me!" said he. "I bought a sketch exactly like this the other day at M'Lean's! And with the same initials too!—'G. F.' Now, that *is* droll! Isn't it?"

They all looked at Ferrers—curious, but manifestly unsuspicious; while Sir William chewed his moustache.

"Oh," laughed Ferrers, maintaining his compo-

sure with great resolution, "that's very likely. Several men wanted copies of the thing, and having plenty of time after we got back to Korti, I did them. It's one of them you must have got. Lady Blencarrow got another, that is now engraved in her husband's book about the expedition."

"And I paid for it as an original!" exclaimed Drew somewhat ruefully; upon which all laughed—none more heartily than his gorilla-like partner Drumly.

"But why have you signed them all 'G. F.,' Mr. Dawlish?" asked Mrs. Drew.

"Well," said Ferrers, as if embarrassed, "they are the initials of a nickname my comrades gave me, which I don't think I should utter in—in a drawing-room."

"Oh," said Drew and Drumly together; while Sir William laughed and clapped him on the shoulder.

In spite of the success with which he had answered awkward questions, Ferrers was a little anxious: he himself had left at M'Lean's the sketch Drew had bought, and others also. What if Drew should go and scold M'Lean, and M'Lean should describe the person who had left them? However,

he thought, "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof."

But his success in that unlooked-for difficulty helped to make him tolerably at ease over dinner. Moreover, Dolly sat opposite him next Mr. Drumly; she looked across at Ferrers very pathetically and tenderly, he thought, and as a consequence his heart was suffused with warmth and his head was charged as with the fumes of wine. He drank some wine, of course; but it was not it that went to his head. Drew insisted on talking of Egypt, and Drumly of Health, and Ferrers replied to both sufficiently. He eloquently enlarged on the chances of Egypt under English rule; of its productiveness; of the patient toil of its fellaheen. He spoke, he declared, as one who knew something of soils, and the soil of Egypt was as fit now to bear corn and rice to feed all England as—he had been told by men who had read a great deal of that kind of thing—it had fed Rome in its ancient days.

"And you think we ought to hold it?" asked Drew, as if hanging on his answer.

"Certainly," said Ferrers; and Drew leaned back in his chair satisfied.

"By the way, Sir William," said Drumly, "I had

no idea your son had such a knowledge of agriculture as he seems to have : soils and crops, grains and roots, he appears to know all about. I was saying to him the other day that he ought to persuade you to let him manage the estate. You don't make so much out of it as might be made—do you ? ”

“ No ; I'm afraid I don't,” said Sir William, with a vicious snap. “ But before he takes over the whole estate, perhaps he might try his hand at the management of the Home Farm.”

“ A good idea,” said Drumly seriously.

“ You don't take him, Drumly,” laughed Drew. “ Sir William means, of course, domestic matters. ‘ Home Farm ! ’ Don't you see ? ”

“ See what ? ” asked Drumly.

“ See that Sir William means that the young man had better set up house first.” And he laughed again.

As for Sir William, he sat silent ; he nodded, and “ smiled, and smiled, and——”

Ferrers on his part sat—with a fixed smile—for a second or two in dense incomprehension, and when that passed, in a rush of shame and resentment. The sly, roundabout allusion of Drew was to his possible marriage—his, as William Dawlish ! With whom ? With whom but his *vis-à-vis* !—with Dolly ? Was not

that plainly declared by the laughter and pointed looks of Drew and Mrs. Drew ; by the downcast, blushing face of Dolly herself ; and even by the meaning smiles and glances exchanged by the servants in waiting ? Was that, then, he asked himself in quick thought, the kernel of Sir William's plot ?—the consummation towards which he was urging his carefully laid plans ? But he could not really mean him—him, George Ferrers !—to marry Dolly ! Speculation, however, on all these points set his brain in a whirl, and he recovered with a voice in his ear.

“Potatoes, sir ?”

A servant was at his elbow with a dish of vegetables. He helped himself and continued his dinner. In spite of the doubts and questions that were surging in upon his attention, he must go on playing his part of a person who was not himself, who was probably very unlike himself in nature if not in person.

Having had his mind thus brusquely turned to consider his situation, he regarded it with more concern and uncertainty than had yet troubled him. He was like a soldier who, going fairly and cheerily along, comes to himself to find that he is in the stronghold of the enemy, and, like the soldier, he began to look warily about him. The glances and

smiles of the servants a moment before made him note them : what did they think of him ?—whom did they take him for ?—for their young master ?—and if they did, how long it must be since they had seen him, or else how like each other he and the true Will Dawlish must be, or must have been ! That last reflection made his flesh creep. Did he really and truly bear a close resemblance to a dead man ? And was it because of that resemblance that Sir William had thought he might readily appear in the dead man's place ? Imagine his consternation when, as he was thinking thus, Dolly bent a little towards him, and with a glance at the wall behind him, said : “I have not seen you look so like your portrait before.”

He turned, and saw an oil-painting of a beardless youth of eighteen or so, slim and presumably tall, with a pensive, frightened, and somewhat worn look. The startling thing, however, was that in the set of the hair and in the general cast of the features—except, perhaps, in the thinner and finer modelling of the nose—the portrait of the youth might be taken for a portrait of him, George Ferrers, when young !

“Yes,” said Sir William, with Delphic duplicity, “he did look very like that then.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE MISSED ASSIGNATION.

WHEN the ladies withdrew, Ferrers held the door open, and Dolly passing out last whispered to him :
“Don’t be long ; I want to talk to you.”

He had barely sat down again when Mr. Drew posed him with a question. “Do you mind telling us now what was that nickname with the initials “G. F.”? I’ve been trying to guess, and—well, I don’t think I can, unless it’s——”

“Stop a moment,” said Mr. Drumly, interrupting him with a laugh ; “I want to have a guess too. Suppose we write our guesses down and hand them to Mr. Dawlish?”

That was agreed to, and done.

“No,” said Ferrers, when he had looked at them ; “both wrong. But I tell you what,” and he laughed. “You’ll be here for a week—is not that so?—and you can have a good spell at guessing. Whichever guesses right shall have all my sketches.”

The proposal was hailed with laughter and welcome.

“Won’t you have a cut in, Sir William?” said Mr. Drew.

“No,” said Sir. William promptly; “I think not. It wouldn’t be fair, because I believe I know the nickname.—Shall we join the ladies?”

When they went to the drawing-room, Ferrers looked out eagerly for the expected opportunity of a talk with Dolly; but Miss Dawlish kept such dragon-guard over her that he could say nothing of any private significance.

“I didn’t know, cousin,” said Dolly, “that you could draw and paint so beautifully. I wish you would teach me.”

“I will gladly,” said Ferrers.

“Let us look at your sketches again;” and she rose quickly and crossed to the table where they lay.

But Aunt Dawlish was equal to her move. “Yes,” said she, “they are lovely—aren’t they! And so spirited.” And she took Dolly’s arm with great show of affection and accompanied her to the table. Other attempts of Dolly to detach herself from her aunt fared no better.

Presently, Sir William suggested that the gentlemen should go to the billiard-room, while the ladies talked of going to bed. Ferrers was doubtful what to do: if Debrett had been present, he might have helped him. He concluded, however, that Sir William must expect him to appear in the billiard-room, so he rose and was following the other men. He passed close to Dolly to give her a private look of sympathy, when Dolly slipped a scrap of paper into his hand. As soon as he was out of the room he looked at it. "Meet me," it read, "in half an hour in the Picture Gallery."

The Picture Gallery! He had not the slightest idea where the Picture Gallery was!

In the billiard-room, he tried to lead Sir William into talk about his pictures, thinking that he might then offer to show his guests the Gallery. But Sir William did not respond, and Ferrers did not press the matter; for he bethought him that if they did go to the Gallery, they might stay long enough to catch Dolly in the fact of keeping a clandestine appointment. The half-hour was fast running out. In desperation he whispered a falsehood to Sir William.

"Where is the Picture Gallery?" he asked. "Mrs. Drew has asked me to show it to her."

“Not to-night, surely?” whispered Sir William in surprise.

“No; to-morrow.”

“Ah, well,” answered Sir William, “I’ll show you first thing in the morning. It’s at the other end of the house—the part that has been built out.”

Ferrers lingered till there were but five minutes of the half hour to run; then he said he thought he must go to bed, and left the billiard-room.

To have an appointment with the only woman in the world and not to be able to keep it! To have so much to say, so much to know, so much to confess, so much to ask, and withal to be dumb with doubt and apprehension—to long to see Dolly, and yet to be afraid to meet her alone!—and no chance of being resolved one way or another! He *must* find the Gallery! It was “at the other end of the house;” but what that might exactly mean, and whether the Gallery was upstairs or down he could not guess. He tried to be cool and collected. He understood that it was of no use for him to run off headlong down this passage or up those stairs. He could not ask anyone openly to show him to “the Picture Gallery;” but he thought that if a servant should come along with a candle he would ask him or her to light him

to the door. Perhaps, if he should chance on the way to it, he might encounter Dolly herself either going or coming.

So he adventured in the direction in which he thought he ought to go. He passed down a corridor which was dimly lighted by a small lamp at either end. As he advanced he saw the glimmer of a light appearing as if from above about half-way down the passage. He went on very carefully with his eye on it till he perceived that there was a recess, and in the recess a small winding staircase, which someone was slowly descending with a candle. He waited an instant, till he saw that the bearer of the candle was a woman, and that woman Aunt Dawlish! Where was she going? He waited a moment longer, till the glimmer of her candle was almost in his eyes; then, observing a door close by him, he swiftly and noiselessly turned the handle and slipped into the dark, closing the door again without latching it. He was about to strike a match to discover where he was, when a thin slice of light slipped past the door into the room. The door slowly opened, the light widened, and he had barely time to see he was in a dingily furnished room, whose walls were covered with books, and to whip himself behind a curtain,

when Miss Dawlish entered with her candle. She closed the door, and leisurely she went and took a book from the shelves, and then sat down at the table ; so that it seemed as if she meant to wait there for some time.

Ferrers was trapped. There was no keeping an appointment in the Picture Gallery that night, and there was no escape from that room so long as Miss Dawlish chose to remain ! He found, however, that he was standing against a French window, which opened to the ground. He gently turned the key and the latch, opened the moving half, and stepped out into the summer night. He had barely slipped out when he heard Miss Dawlish come to the window, whether because she had heard the sound he made, or because she feared the fastenings were undone. He darted aside against the ivy, and Miss Dawlish not only latched and locked the window with great expedition, and with sharp complaints about the "rank carelessness" of servants, but also shuttered it ; and Ferrers realised that he was shut out !

CHAPTER VIII.

POINTS OF VIEW.

FERRERS stood among the roses and looked about and above him. The faint stars twinkled in the stilly night, the trees sighed sleepily, and vague, secret-seeming shadows lurked around. The cool air was laden with fragrance, and his soul was bedewed with the languorous richness of the odours of rose and honeysuckle, even as his head was moistened and refreshed by the summer dew. It was such a night as brings men face to face with the seriousness and seductiveness of Nature, as attunes their souls to large and noble thoughts, and at the same time tempts them to indulge in the sensuous fancies of love.

Ferrers was a man rather of action than of contemplation ; his training as a soldier had induced on him something of the spirit of the not too scrupulous adventurer, and his experience of barrack-life had somewhat coarsened the fibre of his affections. Yet,

withal, the true, deep-seated Ferrers was a person of serious mind, honest heart, and romantic passion. Standing therein the vast stillness and melting beauty of the night, he became for the first time really aware of himself, and alarmed at the contrary impulses and desires that were pulling him this way and that. Without troubling to inquire how this strange effect was produced, he resolved to "have it out with" himself.

He supposed he could get admitted to the house an hour thence as easily as at that precise moment; he did not particularly care whether he were let in at all; in any case, he would have a quiet walk. He was in evening dress, and he had no hat; but these facts did not trouble him: he was used to being exposed and to going bareheaded. So he put his hands in his pockets, and, with his eye fixed on the distance, sauntered away through the garden and across the park.

He set himself steadily to examine the conditions of his situation: how had he got into the coil in which he was involved? When—in an extremely needy hour—Sir William Dawlish had proposed to pay him a hundred pounds to merely call himself "William Dawlish" and behave as such, he had

promptly closed with the offer, thinking of it simply as a daring "lark," and seeing nothing of the painful issues and possibilities of his assumption. Now, in little more than a week, how was he situated? He found that he had not been able to behave as if he had been a block of wood or an automatic machine, or even an actor; he found that, in his own proper person as George Ferrers, he had been caught into the kindest and friendliest feeling for one of "the jokers" whom he had engaged to get the better of in some way in his character as William Dawlish. He suspected that a match was planned between him, as William Dawlish, and the young lady whom George Ferrers found the most adorable woman in the world; and last and worst of all, he believed that young lady loved him as William Dawlish. Would it be impossible for her to love him as George Ferrers? Ah, if she only could! But the wish, the longing, was manifestly absurd. He could not, and he would not, hide from himself the fact—bitter as gall though it was to swallow!—that, though he was in all sufficient respects as strong, healthy, honourable, and complete a man as any in the land, he was shut out from all hope of marrying a lady of Dorothy Dawlish's position. He was but a poor soldier, with

nothing to do—absolutely on the level of the unemployed workman—and if he ever married at all, he must marry a housemaid, a shop-girl, or, at best, a lady's-maid. He did not know why Sir William planned to work this deceit off upon his niece, or how he meant to consummate it—he hoped, indeed, no real harm was intended her—but he could no longer continue his share in it. It was unfair and cruel to Dolly—the dearest and loveliest of girls ! It might be painful and humiliating for her to know the truth ; but to continue the deceit was shameful and unendurable. He would go to Sir William, tell him he found it impossible to fulfil his engagement, and ask to be let off his bargain : he would forego all promised advantage, and return penniless to London, a sadder but a wiser man.

By the time he had got as far with himself as that, he discovered that his hair was wet, his shirt-front sodden, and his feet drenched with dew : he believed he had frequently been walking on the turf, and he saw that he was coming out on the carriage-drive just by the lodge. The door of the lodge was open, and in the light which flowed from it Ferrers saw a man standing in his shirt-sleeves smoking a churchwarden pipe. When he came over against

him, he perceived he was an oldish man, and guessed he was the lodge-keeper. The man hailed him and stepped out towards him.

“Ah, theer ye are, Mas'r Willium! Ah've been wonderin' if ye was to drop down an' see me. Ah on'y heerd a hour or two agoo as how ye was at 'ome again. Heigh! But ye've been years an' years in foreign parts, an' it's a thick lump o' time since ah've seen ye! Ee, but hain't ye growed bigger an' broader? Sewer-ly! But ye're a fine man now!”

“Humph!” said Ferrers, not knowing well what to say and not troubling much. “You know me, then?”

“Know ye! Ah should think so! Thik-theer dare-devil way o' yourn tells me! ‘Who but Mas'r Willium,’ says ah to myself, ‘can be gallivantin’ out wi’ ne’er a ‘at on his ‘ead?’ No more gallivantin’s now, though! He, he, he!” And the old man laughed a creaking, mirthless laugh. “Ah’ve heerd ye’re goin’ to be what we terms a family man.”

“Something of that sort, I suppose,” said Ferrers. “But I must say ‘Good-night;’ I find I’m very wet with the dew.”

“Heigh! But your voice is got stronger than it

used to be too ! Dear, dear ! An' to think that ah might niver ha' seen ye thik-heer blessed night, if th' old woman hadn't got as crass as two sticks !—about nothin' at all, of course ! So, ah comes to th' door for a smoke, an' ah sees ye ! ”

“ Well, good-night,” said Ferrers.

“ Good-night, Mas'r Willium—Hullo ! Who's thik-heer ? ”

A man—a tall man—had walked up to the gate from the road and had pulled the clanging bell. The lodge-keeper went to the gate, while Ferrers stood still to see if the tall man could be Lord Debrett. The gate, after a word of parley, was opened, and the man entered. It was Debrett

“ What ? Is that you—er—Dawlish ? ” he asked as he approached. “ What are you doing down here like that ? ”

“ Gallivantin' my lard,” laughed the old man. “ He, he, he ! He was always a gallivanter ! —Good-night, Mas'r Willium ; good-night, my lard ! ”

“ He seems to know you,” said Debrett, as they walked away together.

“ Yes,” said Ferrers ; “ better than I know myself. —But how is it you have just appeared ? ”

"I could not get away early ; but I remembered my promise to you to be here to-day. So I telegraphed to your father——"

"My father?"

"Your—what do you call it?—*putative* father, Sir William."

"Hang it, Debrett," said Ferrers gloomily ; "don't joke about that."

Debrett looked closely at him, and continued : "I telegraphed that I would come by the last train and walk over with a handbag from the station. My man will come down with my things first train in the morning."

"I see," said Ferrers.

"It seems to me," said Debrett, "you must be still in a funk. How are things going ? Anything happened ? Surely nothing much in the way of action can have been done on the first night of meeting."

"No ; nothing much has happened, except that I have had to tell another lie or two.—Look here, Debrett ; I'm going to clear out of the whole business."

"Hallo !" said Debrett. "What's that for ? Spoil the sport just when it's going to come off !"

"I don't find it sport any longer," said Ferrers.

“What? Has Dawlish been cutting up rough? He’s capable of that, I daresay; but hadn’t you better just have a straight talk with him?”

“I mean to have a talk with him,” said Ferrers, “but not for that reason: I’ve nothing in particular to complain of in his behaviour.”

“What the dickens is the matter, then?”

“It’s just this, Debrett: I’m beastly uncomfortable about the whole affair. The longer I go on with it, the more mess I’m getting into.”

“Oh! Bothered about Drumly again?”

“That’s part of the mess; but the worst is something I found out to-night. We were talking at dinner, all very friendly. Sir William said something about home-farming, and that joker Drew took it that he was speaking about setting up house. I didn’t see the thing quite at first. Everybody was smiling or looking comic about it; I even caught the servants tipping the wink to each other. ‘Hallo!’ says I to myself, ‘there’s something in this!’ And then—you know how you see a thing all in a flash, and wonder that you were such an ass as not to see it before. ‘By Jingo!’ thinks I, ‘they mean *me* and Miss Dawlish to set up house!’”

“You and Miss Dawlish?” said Debrett.

“ You know what I mean : me, as Will Dawlish, to marry Dolly Dawlish.”

“ Oh, is that the game ? ” exclaimed Debrett.—
“ Dolly, I suppose, has lots of money, then ? ”

“ I don’t know anything about that ; but money or no money, it’s an abominable shame to treat a girl in that way, and I’m not going to do it.”

“ But,” said Debrett, “ it struck me when you first told me about Dolly that you were lost in admiration of her—in fact, that you were quite gone.”

“ So I was,” said Ferrers bitterly ; “ the more fool I. I didn’t see or think where I might be going, till I heard this to-night. But, by Jingo ! I know now, and I’m going to stop it ! ”

“ I don’t quite see,” murmured Debrett.

“ Don’t you see,” explained Ferrers, somewhat incoherently, “ that it’s one thing to hang about with a kind, lovely girl like Dolly, talking to her and looking at her, and feeling that she likes to be with you ? It comforts you and sets you up without your quite knowing why. But it’s another thing altogether when you see all that brought slap down to the practical business of marriage—marriage with the person that you’re not, but that you pretend to be ! Then you’ve got to stand up and tell yourself the

truth, and say to yourself : ‘ Come now, you’ve just been bluffing yourself all this time. You’ve been admiring the girl ; and you’ve got fond of her—doosed fond, I may say—and there may be no great harm in that ; but when you’re properly fond of a girl, and you think she is of you, then—why—you want her for your own self. But here there can’t be any marriage ; first because the girl likes you, not for your being yourself, but for your being to her somebody else ; and second, because, even if she liked you for yourself, she couldn’t marry you.—You know, for all your being a big long-legged brute, and the son of a fine honest old father that always paid his way, you’re no better than a beggar ! ’ ‘ Pon my soul, Debrett ! isn’t that the plain downright truth ? And isn’t the proper thing to do—the only fair thing to the girl—to stop the whole game, and let Sir William explain it as he likes ? Let him call me a villain, an impostor, if he likes ! By Jove ! I think I deserve it ! ”

“ But stop a minute,” said Debrett. “ Perhaps you’re mistaken about the marriage.”

“ I’m not mistaken, Debrett,” said Ferrers positively. “ I can’t quite explain to you all the little things that make me certain about it ; but certain I

am that Sir William's game is a match between William and Dolly Dawlish."

"It comes to this, then," said Debrett with a laugh, "that you, in a sort of way—don't you know?—are your own rival! Look here; why don't you go in and beat the other fellow?"

"What do you mean?"

"Go in and win Miss Dolly Dawlish for your very own self—for the man called George Ferrers."

"What do you take me for, Debrett? Hang it! I may not be, as you told me yourself, the kind of thing you call a gentleman; but I'll try to pass for it, and I'll not be a cad; and I'd rather go into penal servitude than deceive that girl any more."

"No need to deceive her, my boy. Tell her straight who you are, and ask her if she'll marry you."

"I couldn't do it, Debrett."

"But look here."

"No; I couldn't do it. I couldn't lower myself to that: to ask her, a lady, used to the life she leads, educated, and very likely rich, to marry me!—*me*—who can hardly talk to her, and who hasn't a shilling, nor much chance of earning one honestly!—ask *her*, delicate and fine and sweet as a flower, to live with a rough beggar like me, and in the way I'll have to

live ! No, by Jingo ! I'm not going to get myself laughed at and insulted by proposing such a thing ! ”

“ But, my dear chap, there would be no need to live like that. She'd have plenty of money. ”

“ And do you think I'd live on her money ? ”

“ But poor women marry rich men every day and live on their money. ”

“ That's all right, ” said Ferrers : “ they're women, and it's what is expected of them.—You don't seem, ” he continued after a pause, “ to have much good advice to give. ”

“ No, old chap, ” said Debrett ; “ I don't. But just listen to me one moment. I know more of this kind of life and this kind of people—ladies and all—than you do. And what I say at this particular moment is this : before you throw up the whole game, set Sir William Dawlish against you, lose your money, and spoil your chance of getting anything to do after this, try to make sure that the young lady would thank you for throwing it up and being so lofty. ”

“ What ? Do you think she'd rather I went on like this ? ”

“ She might. All I say is, ‘ Try to find out. ’ ”

“ I don't believe it, ” said Ferrers fiercely.

“At anyrate, think it over again. Sleep on it : you can’t make a fuss till to-morrow.”

And that word of calm worldly advice allayed the impetuous heat of Ferrers’ righteous resolution ; and he said to himself that it might be better to sleep on it.

As it happened, he could have had no interview with Sir William that night, even had his determination been hot upon the point ; for when they rang the bell at the hall-door, they were admitted by a sleepy footman, who—staring at Ferrers—informed them that they were “hall gone to their rooms.” So Ferrers, with a last look-out into the summer night, which was becoming all vague white mist below—out of which stood the tops of the trees, and dim, twinkling stars above—brushed the dew from his hair by rumpling it with his hand, and took off his coat and shook it before the wondering footman. Then he followed the domestic upstairs with Debrett.

At the door of his room Debrett gripped his hand. “Sleep on it,” he repeated.

“Will you be about early ?” asked Ferrers.

“As early as you like.”

CHAPTER IX.

SIR WILLIAM'S FRANKNESS.

FERRERS was astir betimes. He drew up his blind, flung open his window, and took a great draught of the clear morning air. The sun shone gloriously, dissipating the vapours of the night and the sleepy fragrance of the flowers ; a lark carolled overhead in the fresh gaiety of rejoicing ; and Ferrers felt that it would be a delightful world if he only had a clear and easy conscience. When he had dressed, he went to find Debrett. He thought he might not yet be up, so he knocked at his door, and receiving no answer, he turned the handle and entered. Debrett was still asleep in bed. Ferrers shook him by the shoulder, and at once he was awake and alert, as became a soldier. "Hallo !" said he, "what's the matter ?"

"You promised," said Ferrers, "to be up early."

"What's the time ?"

"A little after six."

"What's the use," grumbled Debrett, "of getting

up when there's nothing to do ? There's nothing to shoot."

"There's rabbits, I daresay," said Ferrers.

"Rabbits !"

"Well, we can have a walk and a talk, and a look at the crops."

"Look at the crops—and shoot rabbits !" exclaimed Debrett. "There speaks the farmer ! I wish you wouldn't, Ferrers.—Is the door closed?"

"Yes," answered Ferrers. "And I *am* a farmer—or at least a farmer's son, and not a lordly sportsman."

"Oh, you feel like that again, old chap. All right. I'll get up and have a look at the crops with you."

Ferrers went down into the garden and hung about until Debrett appeared, when they strode away beyond the bounds of the park—stretching their long legs in unison—and entered upon devious paths by coppice and corn-field.

"May Mr. William Dawlish smoke a pipe in the country ?" asked Ferrers.

"Certainly," answered Debrett. "Why not ?"

"That's just what I thought : 'Why not ?'" said Ferrers. "Still, I thought I'd like to know from an authority if it was the correct thing."

“So you’ve made up your mind to go on with the game?”

“No; I have not, Debrett. I’m going to put the matter to Sir William as soon as possible.”

“Well,” said Debrett, “remember what I said to you last night: before you throw it all up, be sure that the young lady will approve.”

“Yes,” said Ferrers. “And I must have a word with her about another thing. I forgot to tell you last night that when she saw we could get no talk together in the drawing-room, she asked me on a slip of paper to meet her in the Picture Gallery.”

“She did—did she? Well?”

“I didn’t meet her.”

“Why? How was that?”

“I couldn’t find the Picture Gallery. I was in search of it, when I had to retreat before Aunt Dawlish into a dark room, where she—without knowing it—pursued me, and drove me out bareheaded into the garden.”

“Oh, that was it!” laughed Debrett. “But how are you going to explain all that to Miss Dolly?”

“I don’t know. I don’t see how I can explain it without telling her the truth. And then I’m in this double fix: I ought to tell Sir William first that I

must tell her, and that will make an explanation necessary to him of the necessity of telling her."

"And so you would have to betray the lady's confidence? That won't do."

"No; I see that won't do at all. But what will do?"

"Let things be as they are; and tell Miss Dolly that you could not keep the assignation because you had to flee before Aunt Dawlish. Then she'll laugh at a big soldier like you running away from Aunt Dawlish, and it'll be all right."

"Yes; that might do. And then, I know, she'd look so charming, I'd want to take her in my arms. —No; I must first have my talk with Sir William: I can't go on like this."

"What an obstinate fellow you are!" exclaimed Debrett.

"Debrett," said Ferrers, and he stopped and laid his hand on his friend's shoulder, "you don't understand me in this. I feel about it more, far more, than you think. I'm hit—hit very hard here. I could die for that girl!—and I'm deceiving her! My boy, you can only tell what the grinding feeling of that is like when you're really, right-down, in love. If I go on as I have been going, seeing her, sitting

with her, and talking to her, I shall have to do something mean : I shall have to run away with her ! That would be madness, you see, and I want to get out of it."

Debrett looked on him, and saw that he must be grievously smitten ; his hopes, his fears, and his desires were so extreme and contradictory.

"All right, my boy," said Debrett quietly. "I understand, and I sympathise ; and I'll stand by you as your friend. Shall I break the matter to Sir William ? "

"No ; thank you, Debrett," said Ferrers ; "I think I'd better go through with it myself."

"The sooner the better then. Shall we go back ? You may have a better chance of getting him alone before breakfast than after."

So they returned towards the house. And the sun rose higher and hotter in the heavens, and the larks rose with a less joyous song to a less height, and returned to earth more quickly. They had got nearer Dawlish Place by only a field or two, when, on the margin of a coppice a little way off, they descried three men.

"There *is* Dawlish, I believe," said Debrett ; "but who are the others ? They can't be the

bankers : Drew and Drumly don't stand so high as that, do they ?”

“No,” answered Ferrers ; “they're not Drew and Drumly. Besides, Drumly's lame.”

That he said on seeing the two strangers part from Sir William and walk hurriedly off. They were both tall, but the one seemed powerfully built, and the other slimly and delicately. They moved away arm-in-arm ; but it appeared to Ferrers that the stronger was hastening the steps of the weaker. They skirted the coppice and then disappeared round its end.

“I wonder who they are ?” said Debrett. “They don't look like farmers ; they didn't behave like servants.—But here's Dawlish.”

The baronet appeared to have just discovered them. He lightly waved his hand, and sauntered to meet them.

“Been looking at your covers, Dawlish ?” asked Debrett. “How are the birds ?”

“Oh, they seem in good condition.—But how is it you are out so early ? I'd have thought that, coming in so late as you did, you'd have wanted to lie in bed in the morning.”

“I did want to lie in bed ; but this man would

have me out. He has got a bad liver or something."

"He doesn't look like a man," said Sir William, with one of his polite grins, "that knows he has a liver."

"Perhaps it's a bad conscience, then," said Debrett. "I know he has got something the matter with him."

"Oh!" said Sir William, with a quick look of suspicion.

"And I want a word with you about it," said Ferrers.

"With me?" exclaimed Sir William. "But I'm neither a doctor nor a parson."

"But it concerns you," said Ferrers.

"Oh!—Well, say on."

"Shall I leave you?" asked Debrett.

"If Sir William Dawlish doesn't mind," said Ferrers, "I'd prefer you to stay: you've known of this business since the beginning."

"Stay by all means," said Sir William, looking more keenly suspicious; while Ferrers paled somewhat, and was sensible of such an agitation beneath his waistcoat as he had experienced when he had first faced "the jokers" Drew and Drumly.

"The fact is," began Ferrers, "I'm getting more and more uncomfortable in this business, and I want to put it to you whether you can't let me off my bargain."

"That's awkward," said Sir William. Then, with a sharp look: "You seemed comfortable enough last night: what's the reason of the change?"

"I've been turning over things in my mind, and I find I can't go on."

"But why? I think you owe me a reason—I do, Ferrers. Having gone so far, I think you should frankly explain to me why you can't go on to the end. What are you afraid of?"

"Well, then, frankly—I am as much afraid of myself as of anybody or anything."

"What do you mean?" asked Sir William.

"Somehow or another, I've got to care more for Miss Dolly Dawlish than I ought to do."

"You shouldn't have done that," said Sir William with a snap.

"How could I help it? You slip into things of that sort before you know."

"Oh! He, he!" laughed Sir William; and there was a quality of cynical derision in his laugh which irritated the other.

"It is very absurd in me, I know. But a man can't help his feelings, though he can help how he behaves. That's why I confess it to you, and ask you to let me go."

"Have you told the young lady that you are in love with her?"

"Most certainly not. That would have been behaving improperly to her and to you. You don't seem to understand what I said."

"Oh, quite. Well, so long as you say nothing about it, there's no harm done."

"But, good heavens, Sir William! have I no feeling? If I go on seeing the young lady and talking to her, I may lose control of myself!"

"But you mustn't," said Sir William, with a grin. "If you have controlled yourself so long, you can surely control yourself for a day or two longer; that's all I ask of you. I put it to you on the point of honour. I went into this business in full dependence on your good sense and cleverness; I have performed my part; is it fair in you to abandon yours? You see we stand or fall together in this. If you give up your part, the whole thing is burst up; and it will be more than a fiasco; it will be a disgrace both to you and to me."

Ferrers pulled his moustache in silence.

"If you go away now," said Sir William, "how am I to explain your disappearance?"

"You will excuse my saying," resumed Ferrers, "that there is something else troubles me besides my own feelings. I may be wrong, but I have a suspicion that you are using me for a purpose I don't like being used for."

"What do you mean?—Speak out."

"Well, I don't like," declared Ferrers, "to be in the position of a sort of promised husband to Miss Dawlish."

"Oh, that's what you don't like," laughed Sir William. "But what makes you think you are in that position?"

"Will you answer me truly, Sir William?" said Ferrers, in a tone which might be taken for demand or entreaty according to the temper of the listener. "Is there a marriage arranged, or going to be arranged, between William Dawlish and Miss Dolly Dawlish?"

"Now you're asking questions," said Sir William. "You are contravening the compact I made with you as a good soldier to carry out instructions without demanding explanations. —I think, Debrett,

that is something like the form of words I used?"

"It is, Dawlish," answered Debrett.

Ferrers said nothing; but he tugged at his moustache, and his look became more grim and obstinate. Sir William noted the look, and diplomatically set himself to mollify and disperse it.

"I'll not be hard on you, however," he said. "I'll admit that your guess is correct—in *part*, only in part. *But*—there is no possible William Dawlish but yourself. It is a sad—a humiliating—thing for a father to confess, and I must say I had hoped to avoid the confession that my son is to all intents and purposes non-existent; to the world and all its duties and affairs he is practically dead."

That seemed so obviously sincere and heartfelt a confession, and tallied so well with what Ferrers had overheard at the outset of the business, that he accepted it without hesitation, and indeed felt rather sorry he had extorted it.

"There is," continued Sir William, "in the expectation of the trustees, you understand, the prospect of a match between Miss Dolly Dawlish and Mr. William Dawlish. — Now you know. What then?"

"Then, Sir William," answered Ferrers, "I can't

carry out my share of the plot : I can't go on deceiving the young lady."

"Deceiving?" exclaimed Sir William. "What would you say if the young lady were herself a party to the plot?"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Debrett.

"I don't believe it!" said Ferrers flatly: the mere suggestion contradicted his belief in the young lady's frankness.

"You are somewhat unreasonable," said Sir William with a shrug; "but a little temper is excusable in you at present. Now I'll be kind to you, and, just as one man to another, I'll explain the whole matter. I'm hard up, and have been for long; a mortgage will foreclose soon, and if it do, I'm ruined.—You perceive I am quite frank with you. All that my niece knows: I have told it her; and she is only too glad out of her prospective abundance to help her uncle."

"She is a trump!" exclaimed Debrett.

"She is a Dawlish," said Sir William sententiously. "My brother left her his heir, with a certain reversion to me, you understand; but I cannot in my need touch the reversion, nor even raise money on it, and my niece can only touch her own money on

the eve of her marriage. You understand that?"

"Perfectly," said Debrett.

"But even then she cannot touch it unless her trustees, Drew and Drumly, approve of the match. Now they know that my brother wished that my son, if possible, should marry his daughter. Therefore, we have devised this marriage—this marriage which cannot come off, because when the time comes William Dawlish will be gone."

Ferrers said nothing ; but his thought was troubled by two points that gleamed upon him from Sir William's revelation : Dolly, then, knew he was not William Dawlish, and she was consciously playing, for her uncle's sake, a game with him. These points were so disheartening to him, simple and modest as he was, that he at once called himself a fool for his presumptuous beliefs and doubts, and resolved to have done with the business, escape, and forget all about it.

"Now I have frankly told you the state of things," said Sir William, "what do you say? It must at the longest be all over in a day or two, and you may judge for yourself whether or not Miss Dawlish is conscious of the state of things."

"I'll go on then, and see it out," said Ferrers

quietly. He was not quite sure he was doing right in assenting ; for he was bewildered as well as disheartened by the new and plausible view of things presented by Sir William, and, moreover, he heard in his ear the suggestion which Lord Debrett had made but a few minutes before : "Try to make sure that the young lady would thank you for throwing it up."

"Very well," said Sir William, as if it did not much matter whether he did or not.

"That's all right," said Debrett about five minutes after the matter had been thought concluded. "I thought it would be."

They were approaching the house—they had indeed crossed the park and were entering on the garden proper—when they saw the very two men from whom Sir William had parted by the coppice hurriedly cross the end of the garden and disappear somewhere in the neighbourhood of the stables. Ferrers, having his attention so much occupied with other things, would have made but light note of it, had he not remarked the look of resentment, almost of fury, with which Sir William regarded them. That look fixed the incident in his memory. There was another thing smote him disagreeably ere they reached the

hall door : an open vehicle drove up bearing luggage and two men, one of whom was probably Debrett's servant, while the other was certainly the servant of Mr. Drumly—the black-muzzled Irish-American.

But all common disagreeable things were forgotten in the deep unaccountable misery he felt, when, on chancing to raise his eyes just when under the wall of the house and against the richest rose-bushes, he espied Dolly Dawlish looking down on him from an open casement. When she knew herself seen, she withdrew, and hid behind a flaunting curtain ; but Ferrers still felt that her eyes were on him.

CHAPTER X.

“THE BEST LAID SCHEMES O’ MICE AND MEN——”

FERRERS’ feeling, however, speedily underwent another fluctuation. All the party met at breakfast; but Dolly had neither word nor look for Ferrers: her regard was wholly given to Lord Debrett. Ferrers was hurt, and a little jealous, not understanding that a woman has eyes and sense in the back of her head, and, while appearing engrossed with one, is truly observing and comprehending the whole behaviour of another. He conversed with Drew and Drumly; but he scarce knew what he said, for his eyes and his thoughts were given to Dolly.

When breakfast was over he felt he could endure it no longer: he *must* know how he stood. He followed Dolly from the room and caught up with her as she was crossing the hall.

“Miss Dawlish,” he said.

She turned and looked at him as if she scarcely knew him, and he felt chilled and daunted.

"Won't you come out into the garden for a little?" said he.

"I was just going," she coldly answered.

He got her hat and his own from the hat-stand, and together they went out.

"I was in the garden soon after six this morning," said he casually.

"Why did you get up so early?" she asked, as with indifference, while she paused to pluck a rose, which she found she could not accomplish without the aid of his knife. "Had you a bad conscience?"

"Yes," he answered; "a very bad conscience."

"Why?" she asked, still without looking at him.

"For one reason," said he, "because I failed to keep an appointment last night with"—"the dearest girl in the world," he was going to say—"a young lady," he really said.

"And why did you do it?" she demanded, at length looking at him. "Are you not ashamed of yourself?"

"No; not ashamed," said he; "sorry—sorry because I couldn't help it."

"Couldn't help it?" she echoed, turning with a look of frank astonishment. "I really believe it was

that you didn't care a bit to come. You thought it was bold in me to ask you, and you wanted to make me feel it was. You have been very unkind !”

“You misunderstand me altogether,” said he, almost beside himself with her evident distress. “I am not unkind : you do not know how kind I could be—if I might. And no one could think anything you did was bold ; only frank and beautiful.”

“Why, then,” she asked more quietly, “did you not come ?”

“Because,” he repeated, “I couldn't. I was on my way to the Picture Gallery, when Aunt Dawlish came along. I did not wish her to see me, so I slipped into a dark room till she should pass. She didn't pass ; she came in and sat down to read. I was behind a window curtain, and I got through the window into the garden. Then I saw that by the time I had made a fuss to get in at the hall-door it would be too late to find you.”

“I waited a long while,” said she, “till I was ashamed. And then a horrid idiotic laugh rang through the Gallery, and I was afraid, and ran away.”

“A laugh ?” exclaimed Ferrers. “Was there any one there ?”

"No; and I never heard that the Gallery was haunted. Did you?"

"No," he answered. "But how sorry, how very sorry I am that I was the cause of your trouble and fright."

Indeed, as he looked at her and wondered if that beautiful and delicate creature really cared for him, knowing he was not her cousin, and was not ashamed thus simply to confess it, he was wildly elated, and the next moment, as he thought of his own unworthiness, he felt humbled and chastened. And still, as he looked at her, a doubt invaded him, too, of Sir William's truthfulness, and a suspicion that it was impossible Dolly should guess he was other than William Dawlish. If she did, could she be so frank and unconstrained with him?

Meanwhile, Sir William had appeared. He sauntered down towards them, dipping his nose here and there to sniff at a flower, and when he was up with them he slipped his hand into Ferrers' arm. "One moment," said he, and drew him aside. "You asked me last night," he went on in a low voice, "where the Picture Gallery is: you wanted, I think you said, to show Mrs. Drew the pictures?"

"I did say so," answered Ferrers.

“Well, if you come with me now, I’ll show you.” Ferrers turned and begged Dolly to excuse his leaving her.

“Where are you going?” she asked quite simply.

And quite simply he answered, “To the Picture Gallery;” while Sir William first frowned, and then smiled somewhat wryly.

“Do you think,” said Sir William to Ferrers, in a low voice, when they had set off together, “that it is necessary or wise to be so much alone with Miss Dawlish?”

“Am I really with her too much?” asked Ferrers.

“Well, on your own confession of this morning,” said Sir William, “her exclusive company is dangerous; and there is such a thing as leading one’s self into temptation.”

“I suppose there is,” said Ferrers. “I’ll try to avoid it.”

“Don’t avoid her too much,” said the other, “and don’t seek her out too pointedly: try to find a happy mean.”

“I’ll try,” said Ferrers.

And then silence fell between them, and Ferrers seemed interested only in noting the doors and the turnings on the way to the Picture Gallery. It was

a long low room, with dark oak floor, and with a low-browed, curtained door at either end. It was lighted in orthodox fashion by slanting windows in the roof, which were shaded by blinds that had doubtless once been white, but that were now stained and dingy. The pictures were mostly faded portraits, with devices in arms and armour between, and Ferrers regarded them with indifference as Sir William led him round and pointed out this and that person and expatiated on their private and public history. They had not been long thus occupied when the door opened, and in came Dolly with Mrs. Drew.

"Mrs. Drew," said Dolly, addressing Ferrers, "heard you were here, and she thought she would like to go round the Gallery with you. She expects you, since you are an artist, to show her which are the best pictures."

"I don't know much about portrait-painting, though," said he, "nor care much."

"That doesn't matter," said Dolly, and straightway began to act as cicerone herself. "I want to show you, Mrs. Drew, one particular portrait, that I admire very much—this one down here. She led the stout and smiling Mrs. Drew down the room by the hand, and drew her up in front of the portrait of

a cavalier of King Charles's days. "Isn't it beautiful?" she demanded.

"Very," said Mrs. Drew, marching nearer for a close perusal. "The lace about the neck and wrists is wonderful!"

"Oh, that's not what I mean," said Dolly. "And to get the effect you must keep farther back."

"A curious and valuable frame, too, I should think," said Mrs. Drew, as she was withdrawn to a proper position.

"Look at it from here," said Dolly: "the face, the expression, and the attitude. Whom do they remind you of?"

"Law! Bless me! Yes!" exclaimed Mrs. Drew, considering face, expression, and attitude through her glasses. "Who is it?"

"Don't you see?" said Dolly with a touch of impatience. Then in a lower tone: "One of us here."

"You don't mean yourself, my dear?" timidly queried Mrs. Drew. "But I'm not good at guessing riddles."

Dolly gave Mrs. Drew up, and at once surrendered her secret. "Cousin Dawlish," said she.

"To be sure!" exclaimed Mrs. Drew aloud. "It

is indeed remarkably like Mr. Dawlish.—Don't you think so, Sir William?"

"Er—yes," said Sir William, considering the portrait again. "I have observed it. There is a considerable likeness, especially in that cavalier way of wearing the moustache."

"And the lofty look," said Mrs. Drew.

"The nose in the portrait, though," pursued Sir William, "is higher and finer."

"I wonder if there really is a likeness?" said Ferrers, scarce knowing what to say in his embarrassment, or where to look in his bewilderment.

"He was a great soldier," said Dolly; while Sir William turned to look at her. He manifestly thought there might be something to beware of in Dolly.

"It is very strange," said Ferrers to himself. "If Dolly really and truly knows that I am not 'Cousin Dawlish,' how can she keep up the pretence that I am so easily and naturally? And especially, why does she keep it up with me?"

Yes; why did she not let him know that she understood the position? Was it because she, like himself, had her feelings so far engaged that she shrank from precipitating an explanation which might end

their intercourse entirely, or at least strip it of its curious charm of half-disguise? He hugged that possibility warm to his heart; but yet—yet—while he feared an explanation, he felt it must come, and he must urge it, urge it at the first opportunity.

As they left the Gallery, Dolly reminded Ferrers of his promise to teach her something of the art of painting, and Sir William jocularly proposed that they should all go sketching with pencils, crayons, paints, or what not (“Make quite a sketching match of it,” said he), and in the evening put the sketches to the vote of the company as to which was best of any given scene. When they left the Gallery he carried his proposal round. It was well received; for there was little to occupy the guests—there was no shooting or fishing, and it was too hot to ride—and this was thought a fresh and amusing pastime. While the members of the party were seeking out sketching materials, most being content with pencils and sheets of paper, a large waggonette was being got ready to carry them to a favourite sketching-ground.

“Isn’t this abominable?” said Dolly aside to Ferrers when they met with their serious and workman-like canvases and paint-boxes.

“It is,” said Ferrers.

Lord Debrett, who had a soldier's rude eye for a practical joke, appeared furnished with a smooth piece of board and a large carpenter's pencil. "I think," said he, "this is about my size;" and even Dolly was compelled to laugh.

So they set out, carrying luncheon with them; and all—Dolly included, in spite of her preliminary disgust—had a merry day till the sun began to decline, and they returned to Dawlish Place in ample time to dress for an early dinner.

In similar wise did the next day pass—with a picnicking expedition in the morning and lawn-tennis in the early evening—and the next. On the day thereafter Drew had to pay a flying visit to London; the bank, he declared, could not continue its operations wanting both its managers for a whole week; but he was scarcely missed, and Sir William still exerted himself to manœuvre the party and its amusements and occupations. Ferrers let himself be moved this way and that with the others; but he felt somehow that Sir William's management was at work to keep him apart from Dolly, and he thought he understood the reason.

"This is Thursday," said she on that day, aside to him, "and we all go back on Saturday."

“Yes,” said Ferrers. “I hope we shall be alone this afternoon : I *must* have a word with you—please.”

But that hope, too, was frustrated : Drumly insisted on carrying him off to see a new reaping-machine at work some miles off. In the drawing-room, after dinner, there was as little opportunity of private conference between him and Dolly as ever, and she after a while in despair departed to her room. Then, as was usual at that time of night, the men went to the billiard-room, and Ferrers went among them. It was duller even there than usual, for Debrett had gone to town. So, as on the first night, he soon left the billiard-room, being sad and restless, and with his hands in his pockets, marched off with the intention of going to bed. But in the corridor he remembered his first night’s adventure, and he thought, “Why not go to the Picture Gallery on the off-chance of meeting Dolly?” He set off down the corridor ; but he was turned back, as on the first night, by the vision of a candle borne aloft by a woman, and that woman Aunt Dawlish ! As on the first night, he retreated before her, and, as then, withdrew into the dark room close at hand, with the thought of going right out, as before, into the garden. When he got behind the curtain, however, he found that the shutters of the

window were closed ! He was fairly trapped now ! He must wait till Aunt Dawlish chose to release him !

But, on peeping through the curtain, he became interested in Aunt Dawlish's behaviour. She had left the door open, and had seated herself at the table with her candle and without a book. She sat with her hands in her lap, and she frequently sighed and shook her head. What grief oppressed her, he wondered, while he almost feared to breathe and longed to cough. The minutes passed in slow silence, and still she sat waiting, with her eyes on the open door. Perhaps a quarter of an hour had passed—though to Ferrers it appeared at least an hour—when a step sounded in the corridor, and Miss Dawlish sat up. The step sounded nearer and nearer, and at length Sir William's figure was seen in the doorway.

“What, in Heaven's name !” he said, “are you sitting there for, Louisa ?”

“I want to talk to you, William,” she answered, unclasping her hands. “Come in and sit down.”

Sir William came in and shut the door, but he did not sit down.

“This dreadful, risky business you're engaged on, William,” said Aunt Dawlish—“is there no other way ?”

“Can you suggest another way?”

“No, William, I can’t ” said she.

“Then you’d better let my way have its chance ;” and he turned to go. “Especially,” he added, “since it is almost come to its end.”

“But, William, just listen. I cannot, cannot see how this man’s appearing in Will’s place is going to help your purpose. How is it going to end?”

“You are very dull and frightened, Louisa,” said Sir William, sitting down. “I have never denied there are risks about it ; but what are they to the risks on the other side? This is the 26th ; and if I cannot pay off the mortgage, or give good guarantee of payment by-and-by, Boughton will foreclose on the 31st.”

“So soon as that ? ” she exclaimed.

“So soon as that,” said he. “And Dawlish Place and Dawlish estate will be lost ; and I shall be ruined so completely that I shall not even be able to pay you your allowance, Louisa ! ”

“Oh, dear me ! Is it so bad as that ? ” And Aunt Dawlish wrung her hands.

“I cannot pay off the mortgage, as you know ; and the only chance I see of a good guarantee is that this marriage between Will and Dolly shall be agreed upon at once, and proper settlements drawn up.”

(Ferrers in his retirement felt a swift pang of loss and resentment.)

“I know that, William.”

“And you know, too, Louisa,” continued Sir William, growing fiercer and louder as he proceeded, “that those two old fools, Dolly’s trustees, would never agree to her marriage with Will as they knew him some years ago, or even as he is now.”

“‘Even as he is now!’ Just so, William. And do you mean to keep up this young man’s imposture till Will is well enough to take his own place?”

(Ferrers winced at the word “imposture.”)

“No, I don’t; though the doctors say Will should be well enough to appear all right within a month. I mean to keep this man only till the marriage is agreed upon between me and these confounded trustees, and till a settlement is drawn up. And that must come off to-morrow, or on Saturday: that’s what Drew has gone to town about to-day. You see how the old fools—especially that baboon Drumly—are infatuated about the big, healthy brute, and they’ll agree quite promptly. The blind old idiots! As if a Dawlish ever looked, or ever could look, like that!”

"The young man is very handsome and clever, William," said Miss Dawlish.

"Ah," snapped Sir William (and Ferrers imagined the grin on his face), "you're like the rest of the women! A good-looking face and a big strong body—and you fall down and worship the man."

"Just so, William," retorted his sister. "That's the danger."

"What's the danger?"

"You seem not to have considered what Dolly might think in all this. I'm afraid that Dolly is seriously smitten with the man."

"Oh, pooh! Stuff and nonsense! Dolly is taken with him because she believes him her cousin. But she has the pride of the Dawlishes about her. Once she knows that he is only a rough common trooper, rubbed up a little with knowing people better than himself, she'll be disgusted with herself for having thought anything of him."

"I wish she may. But she's a romantic girl, and to know he's a poor man may only make her more interested in him. I wish you understood women better, William."

"I wish I did," said Sir William. "But Dolly—you're mistaken in Dolly. She's a sensible girl ;

she has her father's business faculty, and she knows what's due to her. Besides, she has our interest at heart, and she's attracted to this man, as I have said, because she thinks him her cousin, and she was fond of her cousin when they were together as boy and girl."

"And I kept her fond of him, William, by talking always about him. That's why I'm afraid now of this man's influence."

"That'll be all right, Louisa. I'll tell her the whole thing, when the business has been settled with these trustees. I'll appeal to her proper feelings to save the house and our name. She'll meet Will again when he is quite himself, and we'll get the marriage over before she has time to think, and without these cursed trustees seeing Will at all, except perhaps on the wedding morning in a dark church."

"I wish it may turn out as easily as you say," sighed Miss Dawlish.

"Well, now let's go to bed," said Sir William.

So Miss Dawlish rose with her candle and went out, and Sir William followed her.

CHAPTER XI.

“GANG AFT AGLEY.”

FERRERS came from his hiding-place as soon as their footsteps had died away, and without quite knowing how he did it, felt his way out of the room, along the corridor to the foot of the chief staircase, and so to his bedroom. He scarcely knew himself in his turmoil of feeling. He felt humiliated more than he could have conceived, choked with resentment and rage against Sir William, and withal disposed to allow that he endured no more than he deserved. His treatment at Dawlish Place had fed his pride and ambition—such pride and such ambition as dwell in every healthy mind—and had deceived him into thinking that after all he might be a person of consequence ; now the terms in which Sir William spoke of him showed him what he really was : a common, stupid hireling !—a catspaw for the needy and nefarious baronet ! Moreover, the baronet had simply

and cruelly lied to him, and he had been fool enough to accept his lies as confidence given in honour by one man to another!—fool and blind enough to believe that Dolly, the frank and unsuspecting, was in her uncle's plot to secure the hold of her property from her trustees! But, he thought obstinately—the fighting spirit was rising in him—Sir William Dawlish was not yet rid of him. What were the assured facts with which he now must deal? First, there *was* a real William Dawlish to whom it was intended that Dolly should be married to save the baronet's family from ruin; second, the marriage could not be compassed openly, because, for certain reasons—reasons of health, apparently—it was feared that Dolly's guardians or trustees would not accept the real William Dawlish as her husband; and third, it was hoped that, in the last event, the marriage would be effected, and the whole mean scheme crowned with victory by an appeal to Dolly's sense of the family honour. Against these things was set the single possibility that Dolly's love for him, though it had been given as to William Dawlish, might have grown to such strength that she could not withdraw it when she knew him to be George Ferrers. To punish and defeat Sir William he was ready to put

that possibility to the test. Yet, on the other hand, his own admiration and love for Dolly were too high and pure and unselfish to permit him to use the advantage which he had acquired by a trick—by a trick, too, not of his own devising. Would he not feel himself a common, mean cur if he went to Dolly, and said in effect: “You thought me your cousin and a gentleman, a man of your own rank and station, and you gave me the love which you would never have thought of bestowing on a common penniless soldier, however handsome and honest he might be; but I have won that love, and I claim it”?

No, no; he could not say that. He did not believe that Dolly would have loved him if she had only known him as George Ferrers—he had not so great a conceit of himself; and, that being so, he would not take advantage of his own deceit and of her weakness. Besides, who was he to interfere in the private concerns of the Dawlish family? He had engaged for a sum of money to perform a certain part, and he ought to be content if, when the business was done, he received that sum. How he hated himself for not having put an end to the business when first he suspected its quality.

But he put these thoughts away; whistled softly

to himself as he finished undressing ; blew his candle out ; and got into bed. And soon he slept the sleep of the seasoned soldier. He could not have slept long—though how long or how short a time he could not guess—when he suddenly woke with a rude sense of choking. He put up his hand, and caught a lean and nervous thumb and fingers from his throat ! Then he opened his eyes, looked up, and saw by the vague light filtered through his window-blind a figure in white stooping over him. He was at first inclined to suppose himself suffering from nightmare ; but the next moment he understood that was impossible, for his hand grasped a substantial wrist. He neither struggled nor cried out ; and the creature clawed with its free hand at his hair.

“Come, stop that !” said Ferrers.

But the creature continued with frantic energy, tearing at him with the one hand and trying to free the other. Ferrers was a dalesman and a wrestler, and with a rapid and adroit movement he had the creature’s arms pinned at its sides while he held its body as in a vice between his knees.

“Now,” said he, “tell me who you are and what the deuce you want here !”

But the creature only struggled and panted.

"Tell me," repeated Ferrers, shaking him, "or I'll squeeze the life out of you!"

"I'm William Dawlish," said the creature, "and I've more right here than you."

"Oh," said Ferrers, "you're William Dawlish! I must **here** have a look at you." The devil-may-care spirit of the old soldier was roused. "Now," said he, "you see you can't do anything with me. Will you sit quietly in a chair, or must I tie you?"

"I'll sit," said Mr. Dawlish.

"On your word of honour?"

"On my word of honour."

Ferrers then let him go, jumped from bed, and lit the candle by his bedside. He set a chair for his strange visitor, while himself put some clothing on, and sat on the bed. He looked with great curiosity at the person he was supposed to be—at his other self, who drew his night-shirt about him and sat down in the proffered chair. He was about as tall as himself; he was indeed something like what himself might have been, had he started with a feeble constitution and been grown in a poor soil. He had hair like that of Ferrers, but finer and thinner, with a longer nose, a weaker mouth, and a far less generous moustache. But the most notable difference

was in the meagreness of the body—Ferrers recalled the phrase of one of the “Johnnies”—“like a monkey up a stick”—which had the shoulders of a bottle and the chest of a pigeon. There was something, too, of a wild and bloodshot look in the eye, which made Ferrers suspect he was not quite sane. Having thus considered him a moment or two, Ferrers pitied him.

“Now, Mr. Dawlish,” said he, “do you mind telling me why you have visited me in the middle of the night in this polite and—and friendly way?”

Mr. Dawlish’s only answer for a moment or two was a wild and irrepressible burst of laughter, which sounded half hysterical. He swayed to and fro and laughed; he leaned his face in his hands and laughed; and then he threw himself back in his chair exhausted with tears of laughter streaming from his eyes. He had no sooner looked at Ferrers’ composed and somewhat wondering face than his laughter burst forth again.

“Ah-h! Ha, ha, ha, ha!”

“Look here!” said Ferrers sharply. “You’ll wake all the house.” He looked him steadily in the eyes, and that seemed to have a controlling and composing effect upon him.

"Oh, I say!" cried Mr. Dawlish. "You *are* a caution!" 'Visit me in a polite and friendly way,' says you!" And he laughed again. "You're a strong beggar, though. I wish I was as strong as you. I'm not bad for strength, you know, and figure; but I'm not so good as you. Look; my calf's not half bad. They used to say it was the nicest-shaped leg they knew."

"Who used to say that?" asked Ferrers.

"Oh, some friends of mine.—I've a good biceps, too," continued Mr. Dawlish, undoing his sleeve and baring his arm.

"Oh, yes," said Ferrers; "it's pretty fair."

"I say," observed Mr. Dawlish, as if he had suddenly remembered something of consequence, "you've just come from town—haven't you?—with the other people. "Ferrers nodded. "What's doing at the theatre? What girls are at the Gaiety now? Anything much?"

"Oh," said Ferrers, becoming rather weary of the young man, "they're all right, I believe."

"Tootsie's gone, of course. Did you know Tootsie?"

"No, I didn't.—But look here, Mr. Dawlish," said Ferrers, "you didn't come into my room in the dark

and take me by the throat merely to have an agreeable chat ? ”

“ I say,” laughed Mr. Dawlish again, “ *you are* a caution. I like you, you know. I apologise—I do—for being ungentlemanly to you at first ; for I know you’re a gentleman. He told me different.”

“ Who told you different ? ” asked Ferrers.

“ Oh, never mind who told me. But I thought, you know ”—and he glanced round and lowered his voice, as if he feared there might be another within earshot—“ that I had hold of one of those old banker chaps that keep my governor so short that he can’t give me any money. I haven’t had a spree for I don’t know the time ! ”

“ That’s bad,” said Ferrers. “ And are you kept stuck down here all the while ? ”

“ Oh, no. I’ve been staying with Dr. Blobbs. I’m better now ; but I’ve been awfully seedy. They say I’ve had something wrong with my head, and, you know——” He leaned forward and whispered another sentence in Ferrers’ ear.

“ You don’t say so ! ” said Ferrers, looking at him with half-averted eyes. “ Well, I advise you to get back to bed as quick as you can.”

“ Hush ! ” said he. “ I’ve given my man the slip.

He mustn't know, or there'll be a frightful shindy. I'll get back all right." He rose and held out his hand.

"I'll see you safe to your room," said Ferrers. "You know the way, I suppose?"

"Of course I know the way. What do you take me for?"

They left Ferrers' room, and traversed a long passage, which turned this way and that. They then passed through a door into a long ample room lighted from the roof, which Ferrers recognised as the Picture Gallery.

"All my forefathers and foremothers hanging round here," said Mr. Dawlish.

"Yes," said Ferrers; "I know."

"Sometimes," said Mr. Dawlish, "I come in and look at them, and cock snooks at them. A lot of auctioneer's rubbish! When I come into them, I'll sell 'em off, like what's-his-name in the play."

"That would be fun," said Ferrers.

So they passed on, and out through the little door at the other end, and up a narrow staircase.

"Hush!" said Mr. Dawlish, and stole into a low room whose door was ajar, and in which a night-light was burning. "My man's asleep," whispered

he, and pointed to a narrow truckle-bed in the corner.

“He had a drink with a chum.”

He said “good-night,” and passed into the room beyond, and Ferrers turned at once to the sleeper in the corner and shook his shoulder. In stooping over the man, his eye caught sight of a slippered foot, a man’s foot, peeping from under the bed. He knelt and seized the foot, and with a powerful tug drew out the body to which it was attached, while the sleeping man started up and rubbed his eyes. The man drawn from under the bed started to his feet with an oath, and revealed himself as the black-muzzled Irish-American? Ferrers at once suspected that he was the “chum” with whom Mr. Dawlish’s keeper had had a drink, and who probably had urged the young man to prowl into the stranger’s bedroom.

“What are you doing here?” demanded Ferrers, in a quick low voice (the whole scene passed in tones little above a whisper).

“Sure,” said the man on the bed, “he’s a friend av moine.”

“And between you,” said Ferrers, “you have let your patient out. He has been wandering about the house and into guests’ rooms.”

"The divvle he has!" exclaimed the man, and jumped from bed. "Where is he?"

But Mr. Dawlish himself had appeared by that time, looking in mortal fear of his Irish keeper. "Come now, Murphy, hold on!" he cried. "It was your friend that took me out and showed me into this gentleman's room. He told me he was one of the bankers."

"What have you got to say to that?" asked Ferrers, turning again to the scowling Irish-American.

"Nothing," said the man; "and it'll be the worse for you if you say anything."

"What is that?" said Ferrers, taking him by the ear.

"Come," said the man, trying to strike down his hand; "none of your games with me. I know all about you, and there's more will know about you before I've done. So take care."

That he should hold high debate with himself about making all the truth known, and that at the same time this mean, spying cur should with a word or two be able to betray him, enraged Ferrers.

"Very well, my friend," said he, pulling the man's ear—while Mr. Dawlish stood aloof, rubbed his

hands, and exclaimed, "Here's a spree!"—"you know me. I've punished you for rudeness before, and I'll punish you for impertinence whenever I know of it. If ever I hear you speak of me, or hear that you have spoken of me, to any one, I'll find you out and give you such a thrashing and such a ducking as you never had before. You understand?"

He gave the ear he held an admonitory pinch, which provoked the man to strike out with hands and feet. Upon that, with little ado he took the man by the hands and feet, gathering them in one great grasp as if he had been a bound sheep, shook him, and said, "Be quiet!" Then, seeing the door of a clothes-closet stand open, he flung him in, turned the key, and put it in his pocket, while the artless Mr. Dawlish exclaimed, "By Gum! Ain't you a strong beggar!"

"Don't lave him there, sorr, if you please!" said the attendant Murphy. "He deserves it all; but it ud ruin me wid Sir William if he knowed he'd been here!"

"All right," said Ferrers, handing him the key, and thinking that after all none of these things mattered very much now; "let him out by-and-by, and tell Sir William what you like."

"I'll tell Sir William nothing, sorr, wid your lave," said Murphy, while Mr. Dawlish ejaculated, "What a lark !"

So Ferrers returned down the little twisting staircase into the Picture Gallery, in passing through which there broke on his ear from the room he had left "a horrid idiotic laugh," and he understood the cause of Dolly's fright on the night she waited for him. It struck him as a coincidence to note as curious that while Dolly had been expecting the pretended William Dawlish, the real should have unwittingly made his voice heard by her. Poor, dear Dolly ! What was now to happen to her ? Was she to be permitted to move on blindly, deceived or persuaded by her uncle, into marriage with that unwholesome and imbecile cousin ? A thousand times "No !" The very thought of it was revolting and maddening, and Ferrers at once and for all resolved to purge his soul of offence in the matter.

When he got back to his room, he sat a while on the edge of the bed, stared at his candle, and rubbed his cold shirt sleeves. He thought of all that had passed in the very short space of time since he had made Sir William Dawlish's acquaintance. Into what a vortex of deceit had he been caught ! And

yet, to begin with, yea, throughout, he had meant no harm. Tempted by money, which at the time had meant to him food and lodging, he had thoughtlessly embarked on this adventure, which was now threatening to engulf himself and his prospects, and to make shipwreck of the happiness of the best and dearest girl in the world—the only woman whom he had ever completely and unreservedly admired and worshipped, who had ever made him feel what the romance of love might mean. For himself, such a fate scarcely mattered; he was a penniless soldier, a man of no account; but as to her!—not a hair of her dear head should be ruffled if he could help it! And yet his punishment was that things could not possibly be set right without ruffling and perhaps paining her. But he would not spare himself; he would urge no extenuating plea in setting the truth before her on the morrow. She might despise him, hate him!—it might indeed be better that she should—but in any case the rude, ugly truth must be laid bare!

Having thus finally determined to make an end, he was in a strangely quiet condition of feeling, which rather surprised him: he could not remember ever having felt anything like it except on the eve

of a battle. And in that feeling he undressed, blew out his candle, and got into bed. But in the dark he was wider awake than before, and went over and over the ground he had already traversed, with intervals of sleep and of dream, until the daylight began to show on his window, and the birds awoke to chatter and chirp, and to chaffer and haggle over straws and worms.

CHAPTER XII.

THEY TWO.

FERRERS was out of bed very early ; for he had slept little and had little mind for sleep. He drew up his blind, opened his window, and looked out over the lovely sunlit landscape. Its beauty went to his heart, but only to darken by contrast his secret wretchedness. But his way was clear, and he would take it without turning to the right hand or to the left. Meantime, he resolved to dress and go out.

It struck five by the clock in the stable tower as he left the house and walked away through the grounds. He did not linger in the garden, but struck across the park, where the cattle raised their heads from their early grazing to stare at him. He discovered soon that he was not the only early riser. As he climbed over a hillock in his course he noticed some little way off two men disappear into a clump of holly-trees and brushwood, at the end of the larch

plantation. Something in the set and gait of one of the figures made him think of his midnight visitor. He did not particularly wish to meet and converse with him again ; but he was curious to see what he was out for. The clump into which Dawlish and his companion—probably his “ man ”—had vanished was continued in the plantation across Ferrers’ line of route, and to its nearest point Ferrers made at a sharp pace.

When he reached it he saw a little way off a hollow glade—somewhat like a spoon at the end of its handle—and in the glade the two men with their coats off and with their shirt sleeves rolled up. With interest quickened into alarm he slipped nearer, and saw that the men were preparing to box with gloves, and was satisfied. He lingered, however, to witness a round or two, and to hear the one (young Dawlish) say, “ That’s enough for a morning breather,” and the other reply, “ No, no, sorr ; that isn’t enough. Up wid your mauleys ; ” and then he withdrew, and returned towards the house.

He was within the enclosure of the garden proper when he saw another early riser still, who made him hesitate, and feel as if he would like to hide or run away. It was Dolly in a morning robe of white, and with a red parasol to shade her from the sun.

The burden of the confession he had to make was as lead in his heart and on his feet ; but he was drawn on in spite of himself, for he knew she had seen him, and when her bright look was bent on him, to her he must always turn. He did not know what he meant to do or to say ; he only felt that he must present himself to her, lay himself and his deceits bare to her, and let her judge him.

He was approaching her, and she was waiting for him with a smile, when down one of the gravel walks trotted Aunt Dawlish in a great straw hat. "Dolly dear," she called, "you must be getting your feet wet on the dewy grass."

"I'm not, aunt," said Dolly. "What a fidget you are ! But, to please you, I'll stand on the gravel."

"You'd better come in, my dear," said Aunt Dawlish, now close to her ; it's much too early for you to be out. You'll quite soil your complexion with these absurd country ideas. Besides," she continued, taking her arm and whispering in her ear——

Whatever it was that Aunt Dawlish said in her ear, it made her blush divinely.

"Adieu, cousin," said she, "for the present ;" and she departed into the house.

He hung about the garden till he was weary ; he

saw Drew come out—this day with Drumly—after an early breakfast, and depart again in a waggonette to take the train to town ; he kept out of the way, for he did not wish to talk with the bankers then, and by-and-by he heard the breakfast-bell ring, and went in. He was unavoidably somewhat cold and distant in his “ Good morning ” to Sir William ; nor was he very good company at table. Now and again he found Dolly’s eyes wistfully fixed on him, and his heart was wrung with grief and dismay at what was about to happen. Yet he was resolved to take the first opportunity to bring things to an issue.

It did not seem as if there would be much difficulty in arranging a private interview between himself and Dolly ; for there was no excursion, Debrett being gone for the day, and Drew and Drumly on a visit to town—on the business of the projected marriage doubtless. Yet it was long before he could encounter her alone, Aunt Dawlish kept such dragon-guard over her. At length in desperation he resolved to do as she had once done herself when she desired an interview.

“ I want,” he wrote on a slip of paper, “ to talk with you alone very particularly. The Picture Gallery won’t do. Meet me in an hour in the hollow in

the larch plantation." He rolled the paper up into a tiny cylinder, and watching his opportunity as he sauntered by, he dropped it into Dolly's lap as she sat reading on a shady bench in the company of Aunt Dawlish and Mrs. Drew. That done, he moved away, and by a roundabout route made for the plantation. At the end of about half an hour he was in the hollow glade where he had seen young Dawlish and his "man" sparring in the early morning. He had quite half an hour to wait, and, to consume the time and allay his restlessness and the foolish flutters that invaded even his great chest, he set himself to cut and shape a holly-stick.

At last he heard the rustle of a footstep, and his heart leaped within him, less—alas!—with joy, than with grief and pain. She came—his own, his sweet!—to whom he could never tell how sweet and dear she was. He went with slow steps to meet her, trying the strength of his stick as he went, trying it so that he snapped it. But it did not break clean; it was green and tough, and the lacerated fibres still held together.

"I wonder," he thought, "if that is how this parting is going to be!"

When they met, she looked open-eyed and dis-

turbed. "What is the matter?" she asked. "I see there is something. There seems to be something the matter with every one to-day. I saw a strange man cross the end of the garden this morning. I told Aunt Dawlish, and said what he was like, and she looked fit to drop with fright, and begged me not to speak about it. The curious thing is that I feel as if I ought to know him."

"What was he like?" asked Ferrers with a sure expectation of the answer.

"He was as tall as you, but narrow all about here"—indicating her own chest—"and pinched, as if he had grown up in a tight place; and he looked at me, and smiled, and bowed like an idiot, till a man that was with him took him by the arm, and led him away. I wish I could think who he is."

"Miss Dawlish," said Ferrers, nerving himself to open the great exposure, "that is the very thing I asked you here to tell you about. That man you saw is your *cousin*, *William Dawlish*: I am not."

She gazed at him a moment with wide-open, startled eyes. Then she shrank back a step, and put up her hands to her face, as if she would hide herself. Her feeling was clear. She was ashamed through all her nature that she had been frank, and even bold

—as the world counts boldness—with a man who proved to be an utter stranger!

“Oh!” she cried. “What dreadful thing is this?”

“I am afraid,” said Ferrers, “I have done you great wrong; but you may be sure I never meant it.”

“Who are you, then?” she asked.

“My name,” said he, “is George Ferrers.”

“But what are you?”

“I am nothing,” said he, with proud resolve to strip himself bare of quality. “I have been a soldier.”

“And you are an artist, I suppose,” said she, with who knows what quick, instinctive desire to see him retain some quality or function with which she had believed him invested.

“I am something of an artist,” said he.

“And is that why there are the initials ‘G. F.’ on your pictures?”

“Yes; that’s why.”

“But why—oh, why—have you come about me and told lies, and pretended you were my cousin? You had some reason for doing it, I suppose? Why have you behaved to me as you have, and made me behave to you?”

“I have not told lies,” Ferrers had a mind to say;

but he perceived that would be but paltering with words, since he could not deny he had been acting lies to her.

“I was introduced to your uncle, Sir William,” said he, “and he asked me to take the name of William Dawlish.”

“My uncle knows of this, then?” she asked.

“Yes,” said he. “I would have told you before—the day after we came here—but he said you knew.”

“He said I knew? And you believed him?”

“I was fool enough to take his word as a gentleman, and I didn’t know what to think.”

“And my aunt?—does she know, too?”

“Yes; she does, too.”

“Oh! Dreadful! And what has it been done for? Surely, not for a joke?”

“I began it,” said Ferrers, “as a joke; but I have found that it is very serious; and that is why—partly why—I have determined to tell you the truth as I have discovered it. Your uncle wants you to marry his son, your cousin, and he was afraid your trustees would not agree to the marriage, if they knew and saw his son.”

“Why?”

"Because he is not man enough to marry," said Ferrers desperately; "because he is weak in body and in mind—because he is an imbecile."

"And my uncle asked you," said she with scorn, "to appear as the necessary person, because you are not an imbecile? He put you forward in the part, and you played it. You came and smiled and danced with me, and talked confidential lies to me in the most cousinly way! I must congratulate you on the finish you gave to your part. Perhaps you had played it often before?"

"Never!—never!" said Ferrers, with the air of a patient, strong man protesting against the wantonness of blows showered on him.

"And how were you to be rewarded, may I ask, for the playing of your part?—your part of stalking-horse to my uncle's son?"

"I was to receive a sum of money," answered Ferrers.

"Money?" she exclaimed. "You engaged to smile and dance with me, and to talk to me, and walk with me, and sketch with me for money? Oh, how miserable, how mean, how shameful!"

"Hear me," pleaded Ferrers. "You don't understand. When I met Sir William, and he proposed

this to me, I was very poor—I had scarcely any money at all—scarcely any. You might not believe me if I told you how little. I was glad to get the chance of occupation and money, and I promised to do what was asked of me, without knowing or guessing what I would be asked to do. If I had imagined I was going to bring trouble or grief to you, I would have died rather ! ”

“ And why do you think you have brought trouble and grief, as you say, to me ? I have no doubt that to-morrow or the next day I shall look back on it as a very curious and original joke.”

He said no word, though his heart was bursting ; but he could not refrain from turning on her eyes as simply appealing as those of a dumb animal.

“ Oh, man, man ! ” she cried, “ have you not a word to say for yourself ?—not a word ? ” She put her hands to her face, and sank on the ground in a fit of weeping, while Ferrers, longing to go to her aid and yet not daring, stood with clenched hands and heaving chest.

“ No ; I’ve not a word ! ” he murmured blindly to himself. “ Not a word shall I say !—not a word ! It serves me right ! It serves me right ! ”

“ And why,” she asked, after a pause, “ have you

kept this so long?—or, rather, having kept it so long, why have you not kept it longer?”

“Because,” said he, “as I have told you, Sir William deceived me, and because I have just discovered the truth. I knew last night for the first time that there really is a cousin whom you are intended to marry; and last night I saw him—saw that he is a creature no woman, least of all you, ought to marry.”

“And why not? It is surely not for you to say whom I am, or am not, to marry!”

“No,” said Ferrers; “it is not for me to say; but I hope you will not marry him. It would be better for you to be dead than married to him!”

“You are a very presuming person to say that to me! A complete stranger to express such an opinion of my own cousin!—one of my own family! I remember my cousin very well; and I liked him. He may not be so big and strong a creature as you are, but I’m glad, yes, glad he is not. And if my uncle wishes it, and he wishes it, I shall marry him, whatever any one may say.”

“Call me what names you like; I deserve the unkindest and cruellest things you can say to me; but do not let yourself be deceived and hurried into a

marriage with that man ! And you may be deceived and hurried before you are aware."

"I am quite able to take care of myself ; I am mistress of my own actions ; and I beg you will not give me any more of your advice."

"If you will not save yourself by my advice, then I must save you in spite of yourself. I do not wish to interfere any more in your family matters, and make a fuss ; but if you persist in going through with this mad business, I must !"

"Go away ! I will not hear you any more. I will not talk to you any more. Go away ! And I hope I shall never see your face again. Go away !"

He stood a moment with hands outspread, with bursting heart and swaying form. Then, "Yes," he murmured—"yes ; I'll go away—I'll go away !" So he turned and walked out of the hollow, while she watched him, with her hands tight clasped upon her panting bosom. But he did not look back ; did not show a hint of hesitation to obey her command to go away, and let his face be seen no more. He walked on, steadily on, down the narrow vista of larches, and disappeared.

He felt beaten sore by the hands that he loved, all

the sorer that those hands seemed pitiless. All his world was tumbled about his ears—life and love, hopes and fears, desires and ambitions—and he stumbled blindly on out of the cool shade of the wood into the blazing sunlight of the park. Why had she been so hard with him—so terribly hard? Yet he loved her!—loved her all the more distractingly for the pain she had given him! And how she had smitten and scourged him with her words! She had shown a strength of feeling, an intensity of passion of which he had not thought her possessed. It was all over now—all over between them! (she had begged that she might not see his face again!), but still he admired her all the more for that last meeting. There was, however, a wild sense of rage and revolt gathering in his heart, which found no vent, and which was the more dangerous and reckless because of the shielding tenderness with which he must still regard Dolly.

Crossing the park, he spied Sir William, and at once his feeling of rebellion and rage rose to find its issue. He turned out of his course and strode towards him. Sir William waited for him.

“Well?” he cried genially from a little way off. But when he saw Ferrers’ pale, set face, he was on

his guard. "Halloa!" he said. "Is something gone wrong?"

"Everything's gone wrong!" said Ferrers. "But I shall not waste words on you. You have used me for your own mean purposes, and I hate you. You have lied to me, as one man should not lie to another without suffering for it in his carcase. I do not want to hear another word from your mouth; I have heard too many. I overheard all your talk last night with your sister; I had a pleasant visit from your son in the night; and now I just come from telling your niece all I know."

"The devil!" exclaimed Sir William.

"Yes," said Ferrers; "I wish I could be as strong and merciless as the devil with you!"

"Ha!" sneered Sir William. "Now, I suppose, that your business is done in your own way you want your money."

"I want none of your dirty money," said Ferrers, laying a firm grip on the baronet's shoulder—a grip which he wriggled to be rid of, but which held him effectually, "nor any more of your insolence. You'd better go and attend to your niece up there; and mark this: if with your deceit or persuasion, or anyhow, you get her married to that idiot son of yours,

I'll wring your wicked, lying old neck. You understand?" And he gripped the shoulder painfully; but Sir William did not wince, nor put off his careless manner.

"That would be murder," said he, with one of his old grins.

"It may be," said Ferrers, "for all I care; and it will be, if you neglect what I have said." So saying, he let Sir William go, and strode on towards the house.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT CAME OF THE SIGNING OF THE SETTLEMENTS.

"He's mad, of course," thought Sir William, as he stood and looked after Ferrers. "But men don't do these things. He can't think of staying in the house an hour after this. I've seen the last of him, then; and now I've only got to manage Dolly. Perhaps it is as well that he is gone." So he struck across the park towards the plantation to find Dolly. He had just entered the shade of the trees when he saw her walking towards him. He hurried to meet her.

"My dear Dolly," said he, "what has this man been upsetting you with?"

"Upsetting me, uncle?" said Dolly, looking certainly composed, if not apathetic. "I'm not upset. But you say, 'this man.' You admit, then, that he is not my cousin?"

"Your cousin? No; except in so far as all the

descendants of Adam and Eve are cousins. That was but a practical joke for a certain purpose, which I want now to explain to you, my dear.—Come,” said he, “and let us walk up and down in this cool place, and I’ll tell you all about it.” He tried to take her hand to put in his arm ; but she withdrew it, and stood looking at him.

“ Why,” she asked, “did you wish to play your practical joke on me ?”

“ On you, my child ?” exclaimed Sir William in some astonishment. “ I’ve not played it on you ; I’ve played it—or have meant to play it—on your trustees, on Drew and Drumly.”

“ How can you say that,” she demanded, “when you set him to behave to me as if he were my cousin, and got me to treat him as if he were ? It was unkind and shameful of you, uncle—shameful !”

Sir William bit his nail, and considered his niece with a worried and critical look. “ Was it, my dear ?” said he. “ I am very sorry—very, indeed. But you must know that, if that has been the result, it has been entirely owing to a miscalculation : you must know I never could mean any indignity or—or shame to you, my child. Sheer miscalculation, believe me. And I’m not surprised that I should miscalculate,

when I had so much to think of. The matter is indeed more serious and even desperate than I have led you to suppose." He turned aside, as if to wipe a tear from his eye, and out of the corner noted with gladness that the girl's generous heart was moved to something of compunction, if not of pity.

"What is serious and desperate?" she asked.

"You are a good girl, and a clever girl, Dolly," said he. "Let us walk gently along here, and I'll tell you in a few words the whole business. I have always meant to set it before you; but the necessity for doing it has come rather sooner than I expected. You know your father, my brother, was always proud of the family name, and of this old family place.—You are not listening, Dolly."

"Yes, uncle," said Dolly, bringing back her eyes from a distant gaze, "I am."

"Well," continued Sir William, "one of his reasons for going into the banking business was, at first, to make money to help to set the house up again; for we have long been poor. But after a while we quarrelled, he and I; perhaps it was my fault; I daresay it was. I was in debt here, and he wouldn't help me with his money."

"Wouldn't help you with money?" exclaimed

Dolly. "That seems very unlike my father: he always gave me more than I wanted."

"Ah, that was different, my dear. He gave me none; and the consequence was that I had to mortgage the estate for a certain sum (mortgage, my dear, means that the right to possess the estate has been given over in pledge or security for the sum of money I borrowed; so that if at a certain time the money is not paid back, the person that lent the money comes and takes the house and estate), and that has gone on till the estate is mortgaged 'up to the hilt,' as people say, and if I cannot pay it off by the 31st, house and estate and all are lost."

"And other people will own this place—this wood, and the park, and the farms—and come to live in the dear old house? Oh, how dreadful! And father knew that that might happen?"

"Er—no," said Sir William; "I never told him of the mortgages."

"But you'll pay the people, won't you, and not let the place go?"

"I can't, my dear—I can't! And that's why I am telling you all this. Your father would not help me with money; but he was still proud of the family name, and wished to keep it up. Now, I had only

a son, and he had only a daughter—your own self; and his plan was that you and my boy should marry: you would bring the money and he the estate; and so the family would be set up again.”

“Yes, uncle, I know all that,” said Dolly.

“And you were brought up to look forward to that.—Are you listening, my child?”

“Yes, uncle. But I don’t see what that has to do with your curious joke of introducing to me as my cousin a man who is not my cousin.”

“I’m coming to that, my dear. Your father had one reservation—an important one—about your marriage. He believed that marriage between cousins is unfortunate unless they are quite healthy people: because of their relationship, you understand, my child. Now, he got it into his head that my boy, your cousin Will, was not so heartily strong as he would like him to be, though he thought he might be all right as he got older. So before he died, he instructed your guardians, Drew and Drumly, not to sanction the marriage unless they were satisfied of the good health of your cousin. For a long while, as you know, your cousin has been away to grow strong; but he is not yet all that he ought to be.”

"I know," Dolly astonished her uncle by declaring.

"I saw him this morning."

"You saw him this morning?"

"I did not know at the time that it was he ; but I know now. I only saw him at a distance."

"Well—as you probably saw, my dear," said Sir William—"he is very nearly as well as anybody need be, though I should not like to show him to your guardians for a month or more. Now you understand why, in my desperation, I let the man Ferrers introduce himself to them as William Dawlish."

"No," said Dolly ; "I don't understand."

"Look here, my dear," said Sir William. "I'm in this desperate and deplorable fix: the estate, the house, and everything must go, on the 31st, if the mortgage be not paid ; my only chance of paying it off is by your marriage with your cousin being—not celebrated but sanctioned ; and that sanction your cousin is not ready to win from your guardians. I find, then, a man who is like enough to your cousin to pass for him among people who have not seen him for years, and who is strong and healthy enough to win the sanction by merely showing himself."

"Still, I don't understand," persisted Dolly.

"How does the sanction give you money to pay the mortgage?"

"Surely you know, my dear," said Sir William, "that as soon as your guardians sign the sanction of your marriage, you have command of all your father's money to do what you like with; while you are recommended to apply a certain part of it to buy back the parts of the Dawlish estate that long ago were lost."

"I shall have command of all my father's money?" exclaimed Dolly.

"You, my dear, and you alone. And," continued Sir William, "I know that you are as fond of the Dawlish estate, and as proud of the Dawlish name, as your father was, or as I am."

"Is the Dawlish name," asked Dolly simply, "something to be very proud of?"

"Surely, my child. And you would not let it, or the Dawlish estate, be lost, would you?"

"I should not like to see other people—strangers—living here."

"Well, then, my child: it all depends on you. Your guardians are bringing down the papers this afternoon, and will sign the sanction, and hand over to you the control of the money."

“That means, uncle,” said Dolly, stopping and looking in Sir William’s face, “that you have arranged that my marriage with my cousin shall be settled this afternoon ; and that then, as soon as I have in that way got the right to my father’s money. I shall pay off your mortgage. You have arranged all that without asking me.”

Sir William looked uncomfortable and somewhat foolish ; decidedly the girl had more business faculty than he had imagined.

“I did not wish to trouble you about it. Besides, my plan would not have worked smoothly with you before your guardians if you had known it, and then I thought that as soon as you knew it, and the desperate necessity for it, you would be sure to fall in with my arrangements.”

“That was rather rash of you, uncle,” said she, “to suppose that I should have agreed with you that there was a desperate necessity for my being played with and put to shame by a strange man.”

Then Sir William was seriously alarmed, and he endeavoured somewhat awkwardly to appease her. “‘Put to shame,’ my dear ! Surely not,” said he. “At any rate there can be no more of it, for the man has had his reward, and is gone.”

“Had his reward?” exclaimed Dolly, flaming with resentment. “Do you mean the money you promised him?”

“Er—yes,” said Sir William.

“And did he really take it?” demanded Dolly with flashing eyes.

“He did. Why not?” said the baronet. “He is only a common low fellow, and——”

“He is not a low fellow!” exclaimed Dolly, turning on her uncle. “And if he were, it does not say much for my cousin, since you set the one to represent the other.”

To that Sir William had nothing to say. Dolly walked on, and he kept beside her, perplexed beyond measure. Did she or did she not care at all for the “low fellow?” In either case, it would be better he should avoid the subject. For him the great matter was to win her to his purpose, and he saw no way of doing that but by appealing again to her generosity, and (perhaps) to her regard for the family honour.

“Well, Dolly, my child,” said he, “you see I am at your mercy—I, the house, the estate and all. What are you going to do with us?”

“Why,” said she, “do you not let the sanction

alone at present, and tell Mr. Drew or Mr. Drumly the truth about your mortgage, and ask them for the money?"

"Ask them for the money?" Sir William laughed. "Do you imagine, my child, that I have not thought of all these things? They would not lend me, much less give me, a penny. There is, believe me, no way but the way I have taken; and if you do not join me in it, now at the last, then I am ruined, and the Dawlish name and the Dawlish estate are both lost!"

"If I had the money, you know I would give it you at once. But I cannot—I will not—to-day promise to marry any one! I will not be hurried into marriage, or into a promise of marriage. I have not even been asked yet!"

"That is not Will's fault, poor boy," said Will's father. "He is pining to see you and to talk to you. And then there is no attempt or desire to hurry you, my child; the marriage need not come off for a long while; indeed, if you find, when you really know each other, that you bitterly object to it, it need not come off at all. The immediate necessity is this sanction, which is just as much as saying in a formal way that you *may* marry. God knows, it is not

for myself I humble myself and appeal to you. It will be no benefit to me to get the mortgage paid off; I am a pretty old man, and I cannot last very much longer——”

“Don’t say that, please,” said Dolly, impulsively laying her hand on his arm, while Sir William wiped an imperceptible tear from his eye.

“All I want is to leave the Dawlish name and the Dawlish place to those who come after me—to you, my dear, and your cousin, I hope.”

“What do you want me to do, then?” she asked, clasping her hands in resignation.

“Only this, my dear—only this,” said Sir William; “say nothing about your discovery that that man is not your cousin, and appear when I call for you to see the sanction signed, and to put your own name to a paper of settlement which will give you the control of your father’s money.”

“Very well,” said she in cold resignation.

“My dear,” exclaimed Sir William, grasping her hand in thankfulness, and offering to kiss her, “you are an angel!”

“No, I’m not,” said Dolly. “And I’d rather—please—not be kissed now. I’d like to walk up and down here a little in the shade, if you don’t mind leaving me alone.”

"Certainly, my girl," said her uncle ; "but don't be late for lunch."

So they parted ; and when Sir William had disappeared, Dolly went back to the little hollow and sat down. She was miserable exceedingly, and her heart burned with shame and resentment. For a brief while after Ferrers had left her she felt that she had been wantonly hard and cruel to him ; but now that Sir William told her that he had taken money—money !—for the unworthy, the shameful part he had played, she could not endure the thought of him. How utterly mean and despicable it was in him to do that, especially after all he had said to her. Probably he was now on his way back to London, with his pocket full of gold, laughing to himself at the absurd girl he had had a scene with. With flaming cheeks and flashing eyes, she smote her hands together, stamped her foot on the ground, and left the hollow and the plantation, and returned to the house.

In the meanwhile, Ferrers was not gone. After his violent ebullition of temper with Sir William, he came to himself a little, and considered that on the whole it was foolish to utter such threats as he had hurled at the baronet : it would be wiser and more to the purpose to devise some way of circumventing

his designs. The immediate necessity for him was to prevent, if possible, any pact of marriage between Dolly and the lunatic and cretinous William Dawlish. Drew and Drumly had gone to town on some such business, he believed, and some time that day, he suspected, there would be something like a formal signing of contracts. He did not see how anything could be done in proper form without the presence of one William Dawlish or another, yet he thought it well to wait and watch. He resolved, therefore, that he would not go away until he knew that Sir William's trick was abortive, or until he had seen Drumly and set before him the whole matter.

When he reached the house, he went straight to his room and stayed there. From his window he saw Sir William return from the plantation, and by-and-by Dolly, and he argued that it looked well for his own purpose that they came separate, and not as those who were agreed. He did not, of course, go down to lunch; he lay on his bed to pass the time, thinking of all that had come and gone since he had entered on this adventure. He had no sense of hunger, but his brain was on fire, and he was consumed with thirst. He drank all the water in his carafe, and was beginning to drink from his ewer, when a

tap came to his door. He said, "Come in ;" when there entered the man Murphy, whom he had seen the night before in charge of Mr. Dawlish. He bore in his hand a tall tumbler containing a foaming drink.

"Ye'll excuse me, sorr," said the man ; "but I knowed ye was here, and ye won't mind me, for I know all about it, and this is a sorra black house to be in. Ye've ate no victuals, that I know, and the thirst must be upon ye, and this is just the thing for ye. Divvle a thing is there in it but a dhrop av the craytur, and limmon juice and sody-water. It's just what they're for callin' a limmon squash, if ye'll excuse me."

"Thank you," said Ferrers ; "I'm very much obliged."

He drank it greedily, without stopping to consider the good faith of the Irishman.

"I mustn't stop wid ye," said the man, taking the empty tumbler ; "the barranite might find me out, bad luck to 'im ! Ye'll excuse me, sorr." And so saying he departed.

Ferrers was refreshed and stimulated by the drink, insomuch that he walked up and down his room to allay his restless desire to be out and acting ; but

presently he became unconquerably drowsy ; so he lay down upon his bed and fell asleep.

How long he slept he could not tell ; but when he came thickly and vaguely to himself, and looked about him, he saw by the long shadows that the afternoon must be far advanced towards evening. He sprang from bed, and accused himself of dereliction of duty. Probably, Drew and Drumly had arrived from town, and perhaps the fatal moment for Dolly had already passed ! He strode to the door. It was locked on the outside ! Then he guessed that it was intended he should be kept there, and that probably for that end the drink had been sent to him. He was infuriated. He rushed to the window—it was but one floor removed from the ground, but the height was considerable—he clambered out without hesitation, and, clinging first to the window-frame and then to the window-sill and a contiguous limb of ivy, which was torn from its embrace of the wall by his weight, he swung himself down. He alighted on a flower-bed and fell to a sitting posture, and before he could recover himself two pairs of stout arms were upon him. But he was too old a soldier to be completely caught by an enemy at unawares. Quick as thought, he guessed the situation : the papers were

being signed somewhere at hand, and Sir William had tried to ensure his absence, first, by the prepared drink ; second, by locking him into his room ; and third, by telling off two men to lay hold of and secure him should he have the hardihood to escape by the window. That explanation flashed in order upon him as soon as he felt himself laid hold of. He kept himself together till the men, thinking they had him, bore carelessly off their grip, when, shooting out one foot and getting the other well planted, he swung out his arms with tremendous force, flung his assailants off, and sprang erect. Then he turned to see who they were, and recognised them as the man Murphy and the Irish-American. If they were on the watch for him there, he thought, the great crisis must be passing in some room accessible from the garden, and what room could that be but the library, in which he had already had two adventures ? He rushed to its French window, which, he observed, stood open. He was on its threshold when he saw, in one glimpse, Drew and Drumly seated at the table with papers, Sir William leaning over opposite, and Dolly stooping in act to write.

“Stop !” he shouted, when his assailants again flung themselves upon him. He was in a fury of rage.

He gripped them by the throat, one with either hand, as a man of common height and strength might grip two Dutch dolls, banged their heads twice together, and flung them away. Then he strode into the room, and encountered a strange look of mingled shyness and wonder from Dolly. That look inexplicably thrilled him with a reckless pride in his strength, so that for the moment he felt a strong desire to return into the garden and pound the two men together till they were limp and worthless. But he did not.

“What—what—what is the meaning of this?” said Mr. Drew, in a soothing tone. “You’ve been upset, eh? with the hot sun to-day. Sir William told us you were lying down to get rid of the feeling.”

“Sir William,” said Ferrers, “is a liar. I never had a touch of sun in my life. But I am a liar, too; I have been acting a lie!”

“Bless me!” exclaimed Drew, pale with wonder, while Drumly sat silent and grimly sorrowful; and Sir William with a look and gesture aside endeavoured to signify that no notice should be taken of these wild words.

“I am quite aware of the meaning of what I say,” continued Ferrers, “and I beg you”—looking at Drew and Drumly—“to listen to me. You are sitting

here, I believe, to arrange or to settle a marriage between Miss Dawlish and William Dawlish : that is no business of mine except in so far as I have come before you as William Dawlish. My name is not Dawlish, and I am no relation of the Dawlishes."

"You did not, then," said Drumly, "sign this paper a few minutes ago?"

He showed Ferrers a signature—"William Dawlish"—at the end of a sheet of writing.

"No," answered Ferrers ; "I did not write that."

"What is your name, then?" asked Drew.

"George Ferrers."

"Humph ! 'G. F.,' " said Drew.—"Go on, sir."

"I have little more to say," continued Ferrers. "At Sir William Dawlish's request, I introduced myself to you as William Dawlish ; and all the rest has followed from that. And, though the marriage is no concern of mine, you must allow me to say this, that you will regret it, and Miss Dawlish will regret it, if you let anything be arranged until you have seen and spoken to the real William Dawlish, whom I saw and spoke to last night for the first time."

"Where did you see him and speak to him?" demanded Drew.

"In this house," answered Ferrers.

"In this house !" exclaimed Drew, and glared at Sir William, who stood a monument of rage and despair.

"I am sorry," said Ferrers, "I ever had to do with the shameful business. I will make no excuses for myself," he continued, with a glance at Dolly, who sat with heaving bosom and averted eyes ; "and if you wish to punish me, I am ready to submit."

Drew looked at Drumly, and Drumly looked at Drew and shook his head.

"No, sir," said Drew ; "there is no need for a scandal. The best thing you can do is to go away and let us hear of you no more."

"Very well," said Ferrers ; "I shall go at once. I only ask permission to go first to the room I have been occupying to put on my own clothes ; I do not wish to keep anything that has been bought with Sir William Dawlish's money, or that might remind me of this."

Drew and Drumly looked at Sir William, who gave no sign ; so Drew nodded to Ferrers in token of assent. Ferrers was crossing the room to go out by the door when Dolly spoke.

"I should like," said she, looking at her guardians,

“to ask Mr. Ferrers one question—Did he to-day receive money from my uncle?”

“Money!” exclaimed Ferrers. “I would not accept a shilling from Sir William Dawlish!”

Upon that reply, the guardians looked at their ward.

“That is all,” said she.

So Ferrers went out, his heart bursting with this fresh indignity, which he thought Miss Dawlish had put upon him, and at the end of a few minutes—during which those in the library kept their positions in silence—he appeared crossing the gravel sweep, in an old tweed suit and with a small paper parcel under his arm. They watched him walk away down the drive towards the gate, till he was hidden by the trees.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE END.

"SIR WILLIAM," said Drumly, "would you be so good as leave us with our ward for a little?"

"Certainly," said Sir William, "and after that I should like to explain this matter to you." And having so said, he went out.

When he had gone, Drumly sat up, and from under his heavy brows considered with a grave, kindly thoughtfulness the apathetic attitude and look of Miss Dawlish. Then he turned to his partner.

"Drew," said he, "that's a very fine young fellow: I hope no harm is going to come to him."

Dolly glanced quickly up, with sharp anxiety and dread on her face. "Oh," said she, "I hope not!"

Drumly said nothing for a moment; but his partner was amazed to see that eye of Drumly which was next to him half close and open again: he would have said Drumly had winked, had he ever known

him wink before, or had his solemn face permitted him to believe that he had winked then.

“Well, my dear,” said Drumly, leaning his elbows on the table and playing with one of the quills before him, “would you mind telling us whether you had any conversation to-day with Mr. Ferrers about these matters? You needn’t be afraid of us, my dear, or shy with us : we are your father’s friends, who are anxious to see you happy—old fellows who know the world (Drew here is an old married man, as you know, and I’m an incorrigible old bachelor), and who may be able to give you advice. Did he tell you at all how this had come about?”

“Yes ; he did,” answered Dolly.

“Would you mind telling us the facts of the case as he put them?”

So Dolly related “the facts of the case,” as barely as she could, laying unconscious stress upon the, to her, shameful fact that he had undertaken the adventure for money.

“Will you forgive me, my dear,” said Drumly, “if I ask whether you spoke to him warmly about that?”

“I did,” confessed Dolly, and blushed violently. “Indeed, I think now I said many harder things than he deserved.”

At that moment there came an interruption, The pony-chaise swept up, and Lord Debrett jumped out; he had just returned from town. Seeing the library window open and people sitting within, he entered. He stood and looked round upon the three, and on the papers on the table.

"Not intruding, I hope?" said he. "But I fancied I passed at the end of the avenue Mr.—er——" he hesitated.

"Mr. Ferrers?" suggested Drumly.

"Ferrers?" said Debrett. "Well, yes; Ferrers. There's been an *éclaircissement*, then, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Drew, "and Mr. Ferrers is gone."

"Gone!" exclaimed Debrett. "Then, by Jove! I go too!—Don't take that away," he shouted to the man in charge of the chaise. "I'll want it.—Excuse me," said he, turning alternately to Drew and Drumly, "but you shouldn't have turned him out in such a hurry. You should have heard the whole story. He's a capital fellow—the best fellow in the world; and this lark was not his doing. It was Sir William's idea, and I led Ferrers into it, and I persuaded him the other day to keep it up, when he began to think it looked fishy."

"And how fishy it is," said Drumly, "I don't

think a gentleman like you, my lord, can have guessed. If you will give Mr. Drew a moment, I'm sure he will be glad to give you the real facts of the lark."

Drumly made a sign to Drew that he wished to be alone with Dolly, and Drew rose and went out by the open window to explain the case to Lord Debrett.

"Dolly, my dear," said Drumly as soon as they were alone, "I want to tell you something about myself, if you will let me"—Dolly merely signified her assent and attention by fixing her eyes on him. —"When I first came to London," said he, "many years ago, I was very poor, so poor at one time that I did not know where to get food—not even a crust of bread."

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Dolly, all sympathy.

"One night," continued Drumly, "I went out of the little lodging I had. I was faint with hunger. I had had no food at all that day, and scarcely any the day before. I was passing a restaurant where many people were going in to dinner. As I was near the door, almost mad with the desire for food, a cab dashed up and a gentleman jumped out. In pulling

out his money to pay the cabman he dropped a shilling which rolled over the pavement close to me ; I put my foot on it. The gentleman quarrelled with the cabman about his fare, and made a to-do about the money he had dropped, so that a good many people gathered. Hidden by them I picked up the shilling, and went and spent part of it on a supper of bread and cheese. Now that seems to you perhaps a mean, dishonest thing to have done ? ”

Dolly said nothing, but her eyes were fixed on him.

“ But, my dear,” continued Drumly, “ you have never missed a meal, unless you may have been unwell, and you have never wanted for a shilling. You have no idea how hunger may make you desperate, how it may make you hate those who are well fed, and how it may tempt you to do things you would otherwise shrink with shame from. Mr. Ferrers told you he was poor, did he not ? when Sir William made him the tempting offer.”

“ He said he was poor—poorer than I would believe,” answered Dolly.

“ Yes,” said Drumly ; “ I thought so. He was probably starving, though he was too proud to tell you so ; did not perhaps know where he was to get his next meal.”

“Dreadful—dreadful!” exclaimed Dolly, wringing her hands. “And I said cruel things to him!—cruel, cruel, cruel! Perhaps he’s going back to London to starve now! I’m *sure* he has no money!” She rose to her feet, but in a moment sat down again, and burst into tears, saying: “What shall I do? What shall I do?”

“Here is the pony-chaise outside. Suppose,” suggested Drumly, “we drive after him—you and I—and ask him to forgive us for being so hard with him. It may cheer him up, and perhaps he will not be too proud to take money from me.”

“Oh, yes,” she cried. “Let us go at once.”

Drumly limped to the window and said to Lord Debrett that, if he would not object, he wished to have the pony-chaise for a while.

“If you have really a regard for Mr. Ferrers,” he added, “you will wait here till I come back. You can help me to make things look better.”

To his partner he gave the short but sufficient explanation that he was going to take Dolly for a short drive to soothe her nerves.

“Now,” said Drumly, when he had returned into the room, “I’ll get your things—I know where they hang; don’t you trouble.” Then, while he limped

out into the hall to get her cloak and hat, and his own coat and wide-awake, he said to himself : "She is a high-spirited girl, and I must go gently and gradually with her."

Presently they were driving smartly away towards the gate, Drew looking after them, and wondering what had come to his old taciturn partner. At the gate they drew up, and Drumly asked the lodge-keeper which way the "gentleman" had gone who had passed out about half an hour before. He was shown the way, and then he drove on.

"He must have set out on the tramp to London," said Drumly. "We can't possibly miss him along this road, unless he should have reached the common before we overtake him."

"Oh, drive on, then, please, as fast as you can," said Dolly.

Then, as they sped lightly over the smooth road, Drumly began to let such things as these fall on her ear—sayings by which she could be neither alarmed nor offended, because they were uttered in a kind of soliloquy : "It is possible to be too proud as well as to be too humble ; and there is a humility that looks like pride as well as a pride that apes humility. The best thing in the few affairs of real

moment in life is to be rid of affectations, if possible, and to let nature speak ; for, certainly, more coldness, more unhappiness, and more heart-burning are caused by mere misunderstandings than by anything else in the world. Rank and wealth are not to be despised in the curious compromise of a world in which we live ; but, if you want to know full, enduring happiness, you must set your heart on the simple eternal things of life—love and sympathy, health and honour.”

Thus they drove on, and thus these sayings and simple sentiments fell gently on Dolly’s soul, gently as the dew, concerning which, when once it has settled, it is difficult to say whether it has fallen or risen.

Meanwhile, Ferrers was striding on towards the great maëlstrom of the despairing and the disappointed—the huge London whose canopy of smoke he could discern miles away as he mounted the Downs. His heart was filled with wrath and bitterness, but, at least, his conscience was now clear. He had made what amends he could for the evil he had wrought. He saw nothing hopeful before him, but he knew he must keep a firm nether lip, and work at something for a living—

what, he knew not yet. But he had health and strength : the springy turf of the common on which he had entered was as grateful to the foot as ever, and the evening breeze which blew over the fir-trees and the bracken was fresh to the cheek and sweet to the smell.

He was somewhat discomposed in these thoughts by the sound of wheels behind him. As the sound came nearer it jarred him more. So he turned farther aside from the road, leaving the even turf and plunging in among the bracken. Would it not be pleasant, he thought, to make his bed there for the night, and go on refreshed in the early dawn?—when his ear told him that the vehicle had stopped. He turned and saw that a man and a woman had got out. He was astounded to hear his name called : “Ferrers !”

Then he saw the man move towards him, and the man limped ! Could it be Drumly ? What did he want with him ? To arrest him ? He walked to meet the man.

“What do you want with me ?” he asked gruffly when they met. “Are you going to carry me back, to take me to prison ? Well, I don’t care !”

“You’re a foolish young man,” said Drumly. “I

want to be your friend. And here's a young lady come to have a word with you."

"What? Miss Dawlish?"

He went to her, hardening his heart as much as possible with thought of all the angry and cruel things she had said to him. He stood in her presence with his hands crossed before him, like a soldier standing at ease. He did not speak.

"I have come after you," she said, frankly looking in his eyes, "to speak to you. I have been very wicked to you. I said ugly, cruel things to you, and thought mean thoughts of you. I am bitterly—bitterly sorry! Please, forgive me!"

She let her head droop, and offered her hand. Ferrers seized it in a passion of gratitude, and sank on his knees kissing it, while great, painful sobs heaved his chest, and scalding hot tears were wrung from his eyes. The burning tears fell on Dolly's hand.

"Oh, my love! my poor love!" she cried wildly, now weeping herself. She bent over him, and stroked his head with fluttering hand, scarce knowing what she did, and still cried, scarce knowing what she said, "My dear! my dear!"

Ferrers rose, still holding her hand. They looked

into each other's eyes, and said no word more ; but Ferrers took her other hand also, and drew her to him, and with a sigh she leaned her head upon his breast. Then she appeared to come to herself. She drew back covered with burning blushes, which she tried to hide with her hands.

"Come, my dear," said Drumly, gently taking her arm, "there's nothing to be ashamed of: you have let nature speak. I think we had better take Mr. Ferrers back with us as far as that little inn we passed and leave him there for the night."

So all three got into the chaise, and in a happy suffusion of silence, drove back to the little inn, which stood about a stone's-throw from the margin of the common.

"Now," said Drumly, when they had been shown into a little sitting-room, "I guessed it before, and I don't need to be told now, that you two people are fond of each other. For myself, I approve, and I'll stand your friend throughout; but I'm not everybody; there's my partner and fellow-trustee, Drew, to be considered. I'll tackle him for you, and I hope I'll make it all right. But just tell me, Ferrers, will you? one or two facts about yourself. I know a good deal already, but I want to know more—

facts about your life and parentage that will suit Drew. Let me see. You've been a soldier, haven't you?"

"Twelve years in the Blues," said Ferrers; "and when I left I was sergeant."

"And I'm sure," said Dolly with a simple touch of pride, "a sergeant can be as strong and brave as a general."

"And what were your people, may I ask?" said Drumly. "Farming, I think?"

"Yes," said Ferrers, with a touch of pride on his own part. "My people have been yeomen in Cumberland for ages."

"Humph!" said Drumly. "That ought to be good enough for Drew. And Lord Debrett is an old friend of yours, isn't he?"

"He is."

"That's a touch," said Drumly, "that'll tell with Drew; he has a weakness for that kind of thing.—Well, now, Dolly, my dear, we must go, and we'll come here and see Mr. Ferrers to-morrow morning, when I hope to have news for him."

He considerably went out first, to let the lovers say their adieus alone. They took each the hands of the other, and looked again into each other's eyes, as

if anew to wonder at the unfamiliar depth of love and understanding they revealed.

"Was I very—very angry with you?" she asked, hanging her head.

"You were," said he, "and I was very miserable; but that is past."

"I think," said she, "I was angrier because you were so humble. Why were you so humble?"

"How could I," said he, "be anything but humble before you?"

"Come, Dolly, my dear," sounded the voice of Drumly; and with a clinging grasp of the hand—no more—the lovers parted.

When they were gone, the little inn could not contain George Ferrers. From Hell he had been raised to Heaven—from the lowest depth of darkness and despair to the giddiest height of light, and life, and hope. He went out and walked on the common. As it grew dark, he returned and ate an enormous supper of bread and cheese and ale—it was the first food he had tasted since morning—and that done, he went out again into the open air. He wandered back the way he had come, climbed the park wall, and approached the house, nearer and nearer, till he was against the fence that separated the park from

the garden proper. Long he stayed there, waiting—waiting for a light to appear in the window that he knew as hers. There was a light in the library ; who, he wondered, was sitting there ? Aunt Dawlish with her book and her candle ? Or Drew and Drumly discussing his prospects ? At length the long-looked for light appeared, and he saw the shadow of a woman's figure on the blind, the blind was raised, the window was opened, and some one leaned out.

“My light ! my life ! my love !” he murmured, and turned away to get back betimes to his inn.

Meanwhile, Ferrers' destiny hung in the balance in the library of Dawlish Place, and there is small doubt but that the scale in which were his qualities and pretensions would have kicked the beam had it not been for Lord Debrett. Mr. Drumly stood his friend, as he had promised, but his friendship would have availed little against the steadfast opposition of Mr. Drew. Drew was the senior partner and trustee, and he made the most of his position. Moreover, he was a hard-headed man of business and of the world, who, notwithstanding his manner of genial good-fellowship, had no great softness of heart ; and, being a married man of many years' standing, he had a suspicion of sentimental love affairs. In win-

ning this difficult and obstinate person to a favourable view of his comrade, Lord Debrett showed a shrewdness and a worldly wisdom which excited Mr. Drumly's admiration.

"No," said Drew; "I can't see how we can conscientiously entertain the idea at all. Indeed, frankly, I may say it appears to me an impudent and preposterous pretension. You are aware, of course, Lord Debrett, that Miss Dawlish is her father's sole heir, and that—that, in short, she ought to look very high indeed for a husband."

"No doubt. Mr. Drew," said Debrett. "But if Miss Dawlish—as Mr. Drumly assures you—wishes to look no higher than my friend?"

"Oh, she's an inexperienced girl, and she'll grow out of that."

"She has her father's temper, remember," said Drumly, "and he was high-spirited and self-willed, as you know, Drew. Besides, you mustn't forget that though he desired a certain marriage for her, he insisted to us that there must be nothing like coercion."

"Coercion? Who wants coercion, Drumly? I only want the girl to wait—till she really knows her own mind."

"Certainly, Mr. Drew," said Debrett; "'Wait' is the word; there's no immediate hurry. I only ask you to give my friend a chance—a sufficient chance. And let me say this; look as high as you like, you won't find a better fellow, all round, than Ferrers. You will admit, Mr. Drew, that I know something of Society?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Drew.

"Well, I prefer Ferrers for a friend to any man I know. I have known him for twelve years—I have seen him under all sorts of circumstances, in barracks, on the march, and in battle in the Soudan, and at home with my own people (he has often stayed with me). He is a staunch comrade—and a staunch comrade can't miss being a good husband—he's got all his wits about him——"

"And he has the finest health," put in Drumly.

"Yes," said Debrett; "sound as a bell, and as hard as nails."

"Oh," said Drew, "I've nothing to say against him as a man."

"There is nothing against him," said Debrett, "but this affair, and that, as you've heard, he was led into. It was a pity; it was wrong; but he has come out of it as well as any man could."

"Yes," admitted Drew, "all things considered, I think he has. But you see the thing is he has neither property nor prospect, and, of course—well, he is not what we call a gentleman."

"That depends," said Debrett, "on what you mean by a gentleman. If you should happen to mean a man that would never do anything mean and that always keeps his head, and that can reckon back his people as having been of the same sort for hundreds of years, then George Ferrers is a better gentleman than I am. And as to property—well, he's not rich, and his people are not rich ; but they have owned and cultivated the same land since the old days of fighting between England and Scotland."

"Then," said Drew, with a final burst of petulance, "why doesn't he go home and inherit his father's farm, and not come here asking for heiresses?"

"No, no," said Drumly, "do him justice, Drew ; he has not asked for anything ; it's we are asking on his behalf."

"Then about prospects," said Debrett, keeping to the subject—"there, Mr Drew, you might help him."

"Me?" exclaimed Drew.

"You might offer him," said Debrett, "a place in your bank : he can tot up figures like one o'clock."

Drew stared from Debrett to Drumly, and Drumly laughed "Ho, ho !" in the depth of his beard.

"I'll be responsible for him," said Debrett, "to any amount."

"My dear Lord Debrett," said Drumly, "you don't quite understand my partner's astonishment. Banking is something like soldiering : you must be put to it, or take to it, pretty young to make anything of it. No ; I think the prospect for your friend is to look after an estate, because he understands farming."

"Yes," said Debrett, "I suppose that's better."

"I daresay," said Drew lightly, as if it were no concern of his, "he might get a situation of that sort."

"I hope he will," said Drumly : "and I have a definite proposal to make, Drew, to that end. We can't let Sir William's mortgage be foreclosed : we agree on that. We must take it up. But we can't leave Sir William in charge of the estate. Suppose we put Mr. Ferrers in charge, and see if he can make it pay ?"

That looked merely like business ; and Drew, after pulling his whisker a moment, said : "I have no objection. Very well now ; I agree to our taking up the mortgage, pensioning Sir William off for the sake

of his brother, and putting Mr. Ferrers in charge of the estate, on condition that I hear no more of his marrying Miss Dawlish."

"You shall hear no more at present," said Drumly; "there is plenty for him to do before he thinks of marrying."

"Let me only ask this of you, Mr. Drew," said the wily Debrett: "permit me and my friend Ferrers to visit your house." Debrett, of course, reckoned that if his friend were admitted to Drew's house, he could hardly be forbidden to speak to Miss Dawlish, who lived there.

"Always be delighted to see you, my lord," said Drew, "and I can't in common courtesy refuse to see your friend."

It was impossible to insist further; and Lord Debrett was withdrawing somewhat disappointed with the result of his efforts on Ferrers' behalf, when Mr. Drumly took his arm and drew him aside, and said: "Don't be impatient; we'll conquer Drew. He thinks he's as sharp as steel, but he isn't; he thinks he can see round a corner, but he can't. I believe in your friend; he'll come out all right; and I'm going to make him my heir to-morrow."

It is not surprising that next morning before break-

fast (the party was to break up immediately after). Drumly should have got out the pony-chaise, and, accompanied by Dolly and Debrett—of course, quite without pre-arrangement—should have driven down the avenue and out by the great gate towards the little inn on the edge of the common. Nor is it surprising that before they had been well on the road they should have encountered Ferrers, who looked very shame-faced. Like an honest man, he attempted no limping excuse of his being found where he was ; and Drumly, leaving Debrett and Dolly to drive on a little together, walked along the grassy margin of the road with his arm in that of Ferrers, and told him all the news of the night before. The proposal that he should take charge of the estate Ferrers unhesitatingly accepted, inwardly resolving that at any cost he would be found equal to the confidence placed in him.

“It is awfully good of you,” said he to Mr. Drumly, “to take so much trouble for a man about whom you know next to nothing.”

“You see,” said Drumly, with a grim smile, “I have the misfortune to like the man and believe in him, and so has Lord Debrett. You have really to thank him more than me for winning Drew over to

this arrangement. And this done, it depends on yourself, my son—perhaps a little on your good friend Debrett—how all the rest follows.”

They then met Lord Debrett and Dolly driving back. There were no lingering adieus; for they were all likely to meet in London next day or the day after. Ferrers’ heart was full: what had he done to deserve all this kindness?

“I have to thank you,” said he, gripping Lord Debrett’s hand.

“Oh, it’s all right old chap,” said Debrett. “See you in town to-morrow.”

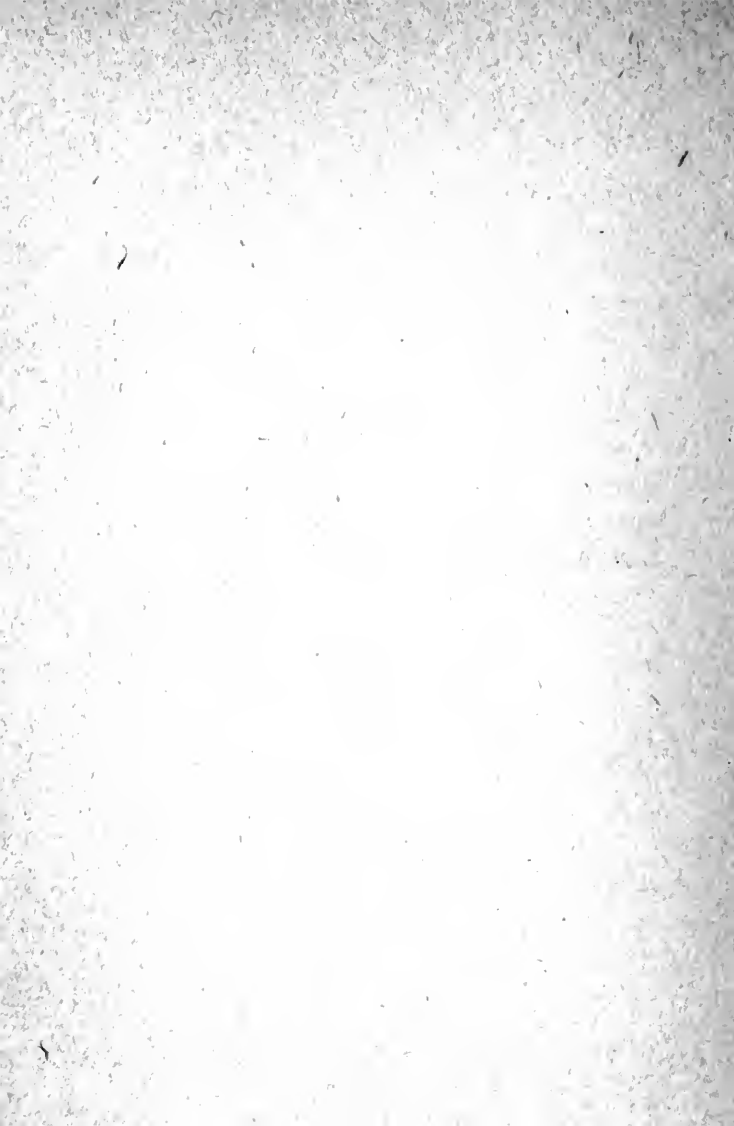
“Good-bye,” said Dolly and he together; their hands and their eyes met, and that was all.

So they parted for a little while. They drove back to Dawlish Place, and he stood looking after them till the turn of the road hid them from sight, and then he returned to the little inn, whence in an hour or two he departed for London.

There are but these facts further to record: Ferrers won more and more the favour of the business-like Drew; within a year he had brought the administration of the estate and the Home Farm to a surprising pitch of order and economy: in little more than the year he was overwhelmed by the receipt from

Drumly of the title-deeds of the estate—Drumly had bought the estate, and the one condition he attached to his gift to Ferrers was that the young man should take the name of Dawlish, so that his late partner's desire might be fulfilled that the Dawlish name and the Dawlish land should keep together; and within eighteen months it was announced in the newspapers that "George Ferrers Dawlish, of Dawlish Place," had married "Dorothy (Dolly) Dawlish, only child of the late Robert Dawlish, Esquire, of the City of London."

THE END.



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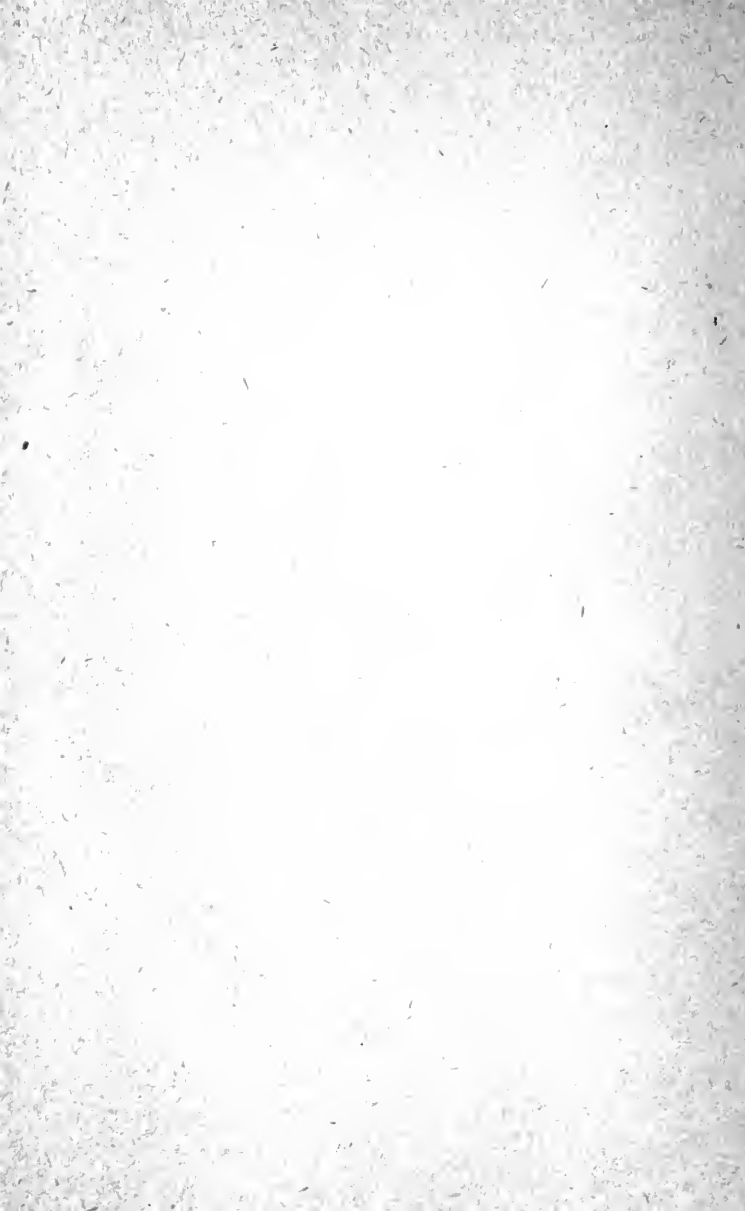
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